

METCALFE'S MISSION TO LAHORE

(1808—1809)

Punjab Govt. Record Office

MONOGRAPH No. 21

By

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

It may look unprogressive to bring out another reprint of a book which was first published as far back as the middle of this century. It is possible that lot of further research might have taken place in this subject during the succeeding years, yet these works maintain their own reference value. The idea behind the present venture is to make available these rare work to most libraries and readers.

The British and other Western scholars rendered great service to this land and their wroks still have great bearing on the Language,Culture and History of the Punjab. The Language Department has planned to bring out reprints of the most valuable works, including the present one, for thd benefit of most readers, scholars ano research workers.

LAL SINGH

Patiala
February, 1971.

Director,
Languages Department, Punjab.

FOREWORD

This essay is based on Metcalfe's despatches from the Punjab, together with such documents of the same time, in the Record Office, as have any bearing on the Mission, or on the military and other arrangements that accompanied it.

The story of the Mission has been told before, but not with full and fair use of these papers. Sir John Kaye's treatment, which is the fullest, makes use only of Metcalfe's own despatches, selects somewhat arbitrarily from these, and is biassed and one-sided. Metcalfe's latest biographer, Mr. E. Thompson, treats the episode cursorily. Lepel Griffin, in "The Rajas of the Punjab", discusses the events of 1808-09 at several points with reference to particulars Sikh principalities affected by them. Some relevant documents are also to be found printed in the Punjab Government Records series.

It seemed worth while to bring together the material and try to arrange it in a more objective manner than Kaye's. But I have avoided useless reproduction of passages fully quoted by him and others, and only summarised such of them as are necessary to the story.

In the footnotes to the text, R. O. stands for Record Office, and the numbers following are those of the manuscript books listed in Volume 2 of the Press Lists, and of the documents in the book in question. Despatches from Metcalfe, when not otherwise referred to, belong to Book V in Volume 2 of the Press Lists. P. G. R. stands for Punjab Government Records, the number following being the serial number of the document in the Karnal and Ludhiana Agencies selection.

The subject of this essay was suggested to me by the Keeper of the Record Office, Dr. G. L. Chopra, who, with his staff, has been uniformly most kind and helpful.

Lahore :
The 3rd January 1943.

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Author

PREFATORY NOTE

"Metcalf's Mission to Lahore"—the subject of this Monograph the 21st in the series of the Record office Publications, represents an extremely important episode in British Indian history. The many diplomatic skirmishes which marked the negotiations of the youthful English envoy and his not much older adversary make in themselves a most absorbing study. But apart from this, the outcome of this Mission proved highly consequential : all chances of Ranjit Singh's uniting the entire Sikh people under his own banner were destroyed; the Cis-Sutlej principalities were brought under British protection ; and the outposts of the British power were firmly fixed on the Sutlej some 200 miles further from the Jamuna where they had been established only six years earlier.

The author has treated his subject in a lucid manner ; and besides reviewing almost all the existing materials, has shown a fair and critical appreciation of the purposes and view-points of the two negotiating powers.

G. L. CHOPRA .

LAHORE :
February 1933

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Keeper of the Records of the
Government of the Punjab.

I—THE BACKGROUND OF THE MISSION

The year 1805 found Lord Wellesley's Governor-Generalship reaching its clouded end. Territorial expansion had been paid for with something like financial bankruptcy, and even he had been growing thoughtful of late. A decade of wars in southern and central India still left operations against Holkar and Sindia dragging on. Lord Cornwallis returned, determined on peace through withdrawal; on his speedy death, Sir George Barlow took up his policy. To some it appeared sane, to others ignominious. Wellesley had worked through a kind of private secretariat, filled with ambitious young men. This was now closed, and the young men scattered over the provinces. Charles Theophilus Metcalfe (aged 20, with four years' service) was one of them. Malcolm at one with him in belief in a forward policy, in the prevailing excitement of men's tempers viewed Barlow as "a cold and servile formalist";¹ Barlow viewed Malcolm as presumptuous and ill-disciplined. The latter had trembled even at the possibility of a new Government in England, as likely to halt the glorious progress of Indian conquest, and had wanted Wellesley to go home and nip it in the bud. "A coalition has been formed between weak and designing men, which, if not stifled in the birth (as it will be, Lord Wellesley in England), may subvert our empire in India."² But Wellesley had gone home to find himself bitterly assailed by many in Parliament and most of the Proprietors, who found his conduct arbitrary and violent and, worst of all, unprofitable.

Discussion raged in India on the question of frontiers. The territories taken from the Marathas during the war, with those of the petty border rulers who were glad to welcome British aid against them, seemed to the Commander-in-Chief essential for a scientific frontier. To Cornwallis and Barlow, the Jumna was quite scientific enough, and they did not shrink from abandoning the wretched chiefs who lay to the west

¹J.W. Kaye, "Life and Correspondence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm". I. 337.

²*Ib.*, 290.

of Mr. Wellesley, but recognised his own favourite system of defensive alliances as a total failure in the case of Sindia, and resolved to reduce him to entire dependence. His successors' views are reflected in Mill's: that such reduction to dependence meant in fact conquest; conquest in its worst form, for England as not giving the full satisfaction of victory, for the Indians "as adding enormously to the villainies of their own species of government, instead of imparting to them the blessings of a better one."¹ But if the system of alliances had been bad, why continue it by extending guarantees to the petty states between the Company and the Marathas, which were bound to become dependants?

The opinions formed by hard experience in this quarter were transferred to the region northward of Delhi, swarming with Sikh principalities as the former was with Rajput. The Marathas were at pains to emphasise the force of the analogy. In September 1805, Holkar left Ajmer with his army and marched to the north-west. His fellow-adventurer Amir Khan asserted that they had been invited by the Raja of Patiala, and Ranjit Singh, and it seems probable that they had had some encouragement, though not of a definite character.² Sindia signed a treaty in November, but there was wearisome marching in the Doab between the Jumna and Sutlej and in the Panjab before Holkar came to terms in December. Some of the petty Sikh chiefs stood by the British Commander-in-Chief, Lord Lake; and Ranjit Singh and his friend Fatch Singh Ahluwalia of Kapurthala had agreed with him to give Holkar no countenance in the Panjab.³ But the prevailing anarchy was such that no firm alliances could be expected, and divers chiefs were detected in correspondence with Holkar. The wealthiest of them had not long since

¹James Mill, "The History of British India", 5th ed., VI. 440.

²*Ib.*, 464 *Note 2*.

³Cp the "Sa'adat Jawed": "Through great humility and flattery, which politicians are enjoined to observe, he (Ranjit) retained possession of his dominions. Moreover, it was through his mediation that peace was concluded between the English and Jaswant Rao Holkar." (Elliot, "History of India", VIII. 353.) For the text of the treaty of 1st January, 1803 made by Ranjit and Fatch Singh with Lord Lake see Aitchison's "Treaties, etc.", V. 21.

been willing to pay a third of their revenues in tribute to the Marathas, and had seemed "strangely willing to surrender their independence."¹ South of the Sutlej, the Sikh confederacies were in process of dissolving into a chaos of minute principalities in which every man was for himself and the devil took the hindmost. The spirit of the Khalsa still lived, but its body was being over-spread with a thick mail of feudalism. The Phulkia family had created three states, Patiala, Nabha and Jhind. The first was ruled by the Raja Sahib Singh, whose weakness approached imbecility and whose territory, though large, was completely anarchical. Raja Bhag Singh of Jhind was an uncle of Ranjit Singh, and was the first important Chief to tie himself closely to the British in the struggle with the Marathas. He was a fairly reliable man, though a jolly liver and hard drinker.² Raja Jaswant Singh of Nabha was reckoned by the British the most intelligent—the nearest approach to the civilised among the whole set of rude barons.³ Bhai Lal Singh of Kythal ranked second among the states. He was determined at all costs to be on the winning side, which rendered his policy at times ambiguous.⁴ Maler Kotla was a Pathan possession. Around these 'states' revolved an indefinite number of trivial independencies. Anyone with a village might be a raja, if only for a day.

Lord Minto reached India as Governor-General in June 1807 : an old Whig and prosecutor of Warren Hastings, and with a mandate as well as a temperament that made for a continued policy of peace and retrenchment. There was no reason why he should settle the problem of petty border states, in the case of the Doab, differently than Cornwallis had settled in on the west. In fact, the choice was here even more obvious. On the west the Maratha might still gobble up the small fry ; in the Doab they were not likely to have the power. Lord Minto's idea, then, was to have as little to do with the Sikh chieftains as possible. This principle,

¹Lepel Griffine, "The Rajas of the Punjab", 383.

²*Ib.*, 308.

³*Ib.*, 386.

⁴"You cannot have a worse opinion than I have of Bhai, La' Singh." (Coltclough Acting Resident, Delhi, to Lt.-Burns, 26th April, 1805 ; R. O. IV. C.)

established with reference to the Maratha danger, did not take account soon enough of the possible danger from Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh, now rising towards supremacy among the Sikh chiefs, is said to have offered the Sutlej to Lord Lake in 1803 as the boundary between his and the British spheres of influence : the principle of non-intervention, towards which Wellesley was already then drifting, prevented the offer from being taken up¹. Ranjit's views expanded. In 1806 he crossed the Sutlej, invited to intervene in the quarrel between the Raja and Rani of Patiala. In 1807 and 1808 he came again. His policy was to seize some lands for himself, but mainly to bind to himself a local party by dividing among the other chiefs the possessions of those he despoiled. By this means, and by intimidation, he was soon in a fair way to establish himself as suzerain between the Sutlej and the Jumna. Holkar's raid had shown that the Sikhs needed some form of union for common defence : events of every day showed that they could establish no union themselves. And it was soon made clear that the work was not going to be done by the British. Taking alarm at Ranjit's encroachments, a deputation of chiefs visited the Delhi Resident in March 1808 and appealed for protection. They were sent away with courteous words, but no more.

The way must have seemed open to Ranjit, therefore, to a reunion, under his own power, of this off-shoot of the Sikh nation with its stem in the Panjab. To the British, however, this was not clear, because they were not thinking about it. Knowing very little about the Sikhs, they were not conscious that behind the bold bad barons of the Doab lay the primitive energies of the Khalsa. They were conscious only that in the Panjab one of the Sikh Chiefs was rising to an authority that might make him worthy of diplomatic consideration.

In 1808 world affairs were in a posture that made it seem worth while to send a mission to Ranjit Singh. England had resumed war with Napoleon in 1803 over Malta, and persevered in it after Trafalgar

¹Sir J. Gordon, "The Sikhs", 91.

nd Austerlitz mainly for the sake of Sicily. "At this point, as at all important crises since November, 1792, the Franco-British dispute turned essentially on questions of navel strategy ;"¹ and this meant, largely, the safeguarding of communications with India. Thus, apart from the Tory endetta against Jacobinism, England went on with European wars for the sake of her empire outside Europe. There were disastrous wars. In 1806 Napoleon crushed Prussia at Lena ; in June 1807, Russia at Friedland, after England had unsuccessfully got into war with Turkey in the hope of aiding Russia by sea-power. Immediately after Friedland, Napoleon and the Tsar Alexander met on their raft in the River Niemen at Tilsit, and agreed to peace : with a secret understanding that if England did not make peace, the Tsar would aid Napoleon against her.

The factor of Turkey loomed large in the minds of observers in India. Before news of hostilities with Turkey (which went on till January 1809) arrived, Malcolm was urging that in case of war Turkey should be vigorously attacked from India.² At the end of 1806 he had written to Minto that the Turkish provinces were swarming with French agents, any increase of whose influence would be very dangerous for India. French agents were also active in Persia ; the Shah was threatened by Russia : he had asked the British representative to intervene on his behalf ; his envoy, Abdul Nabi Khan, had said the same to Malcolm in Calcutta ; England would have to choose between abandoning Persia to Russia, and leaving her to seek French aid.³ Persia was a thorny problem, because there the Allies were far from appearing as preservers of humanity from Napoleonic aggression. Frenchmen had been sent there when Napoleon was planning his Egyptian campaign : then Malcolm had gone to Persia and secured a treaty ; but when Russia began absorbing the Georgian provinces, and England, needing Russia in Europe, could not interpret the treaty as binding her to give assistance, the French connection revived. In December, 1807, General Gardanne

¹ Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, I. 355.

² Kaye, op. cit., I. 382.

³ *Ib.* 395—8.

reached Ickatan at the head of a large mission. A treaty followed. France was to aid Persia against Russia; Persia; France against India. Before the treaty could be ratified the Tibet agreement had rendered it null; but it remained doubtful whether Persia could be counted on to obstruct a possible Franco-Russian expedition against India.

The year 1808, then, found the Company in a pacific frame of mind with regard to its Indian neighbours, but half expecting to see a foreign army marching through Afghanistan against it. A frontier was being patched up. Karnal was taken as a military post to protect Delhi from the north. Skinner's Horse was being strengthened to police the marches of Mariana, where Thomas had reigned and then Perron, on behalf of Sindia, was given back to its own Chiefs; as these failed to restore order it was next year taken over by the Company. But though it might be all right to await the Marathas on the banks of the Jumna, to wait for the French and Russians there would be dangerous. They might raise half India against the British. Hence the grandiose plan of sending out four missions—to Lahore, Sindh, Kabul, Persia and erecting a coalition to check the invaders far from the Company's limits.

The negotiations with Ranjit Singh were in fact to turn so little on French affairs, that it might be permissible to suspect Napoleon of being in this case a mere red herring, and the mission of being sent to initiate a penetration of the Panjab. On the other hand, sending of the other missions, and the lack of any policy about the Doab, seem to prove the *bona fides* of the Mission's ostensible purpose. But it may well be that some of the now repressed energy of the Expansionist school found an outlet in promoting the missions. Men who had been in India longer than Lord Minto may have guessed that sending out diplomats would lead to sending out armies. It is worth remembering that they had a professional interest in the matter. Maitcalfe and Malcolm, for instance, were both dissatisfied with their prospects. The Forward Policy meant more and better jobs for them. Such men did not wish to make money dishonestly, but they wished to make money, and in large amounts. Minto would confine them to the treadmill of seniority; they wanted

an opportunity, responsibility, and the fabulous salaries that these could bring. This may account for some of Metcalfe's early and settled prejudice against Ranjit Singh.¹ Metcalfe in 1808 was carrying out settlement work in the recently occupied Delhi Province, chafing under routine and the excessive civility of his superior, Seton, the Resident.² In the spring of 1808 he nearly came in contact with Ranjit; that chief was expected at Hardwar for the great fair, and Metcalfe was sent there to supervise the arrangements and get into touch with him.³ Ranjit did not come, but many others did, and Metcalfe was delighted to find that they behaved well and did not object to leave their arms outside the fair-ground. He impressed on Seton that the tone of the "innumerable crowds" was "most gratifying to the feelings of an Englishman." This was the first year that the fair was under British management, and Metcalfe was "satisfied that the loud praises and thanksgiving of the honest multitude proceeded from the sincere effusions of their hearts."⁴ Here again one suspects that Metcalfe's belief in the desirability of all Indians being ruled by the Company, a little coloured his impressions.

Ranjit Singh probably absented himself from Hardwar because he was uneasy about the deputation of chiefs that had gone to Delhi. He wrote to the Governor-General, professing a friendly spirit, even a wish for alliance, but referring now to the Jumna not to the Sutlej, as the limit of his power. He must have felt that conquest, and milder pressure, had given him the same title to be on one bank of the Jumna, as the Company had lately secured on the other. The chiefs, meanwhile, were doing their best to embroil Lahore and Delhi. Some light is thrown on this by the traveller, Captain Mathews, who was trying to reach Kashmir with Ranjit's help, and who forwarded the letter to Calcutta. Ranjit, he informed Seton, regarded the latter as his great enemy, who wished to set the Doab chiefs against him. "There is a man with the Raja on the part

¹Metcalfe's salary had fallen since Wellesley's time, and he was in debt (Kaye "Life of Lord Metcalfe". I. 157, 165)

²Kaye, *op cit.*, ch. VII.

³*Ib.* 128.

⁴Metcalfe to Seton, 16th April, 1808, R. O. II. 37

of Lall Singh- named Mangal Singh--who is the greatest incendiary, the worst man, and the most impudent ignorant wretch I ever heard of, and who is the cause of all the doubts and alarms which exist in the Raja's mind respecting the disposition of our Government towards him he scruples not to make use of your name."¹ Ranjit's letter elicited no explanation of the Company's attitude. The matter was referred to the who was to be sent to the Panjab. Metcalfe was appointed as this envoy of June 20, with a salary of Rs. 2,000 and a glowing prospect of setting his foot on the gigantic field of world diplomacy. But his negotiations were to see themselves cabin'd and confined in the narrower area between the Jumna and the Sutlej. He was setting off with his head full of the French. Ranjit was waiting for him with his head full of the Doab. Metcalfe was instructed to obtain an anti-French treaty, and to skate over the *cis-Sutlej problem* as lightly as he could.² It seems curious that his employers did not foresee his failure as absolutely certain. The idea to be put forward, that an anti-French treaty would benefit Ranjit, was, as Lepel Griffin says, "absurd" : and "if the love of the British Government for him was so great, why had they so long kept it a profound secret ?"³ Why, we may add, did they not now manifest it in a more practical shape ?

Metcalfe was the second to the four envoys to set out, and he had orders to throw out a skirmishing line of diplomatic agents who could feel the way at Kabul and in Persia. But the course of his own affairs made this a very secondary part of his work. He picked up at the outset two Mahammedan agents, intending to send one to Persia, the other to Kabul to put it about there that the friendliness of Anglo-Afghan relations "inspired every English gentleman with the strongest sentiments of respect and attachment to His (Afghan) Majesty's person and Government."⁴ He soon decided not to send these men on his own account

¹Mathews to Seton, 30th July 1808, R. O. II. 84. Cp. Griffin, op. cit., 98 : "...it was commonly reported that he (Ranjit) intended so try his strength with the English and had, with this design, made a secret alliance with Holkar and the Raja of Bhurtpur".

²Kaye "Life of Lord Metcalfe", I. 173—5

³Griffin, op. cit., 104.

⁴Metcalfe's despatches, No. 1, undated.

but to leave it to the envoy to Kabul to employ them.¹ The fortunes of the other missions are soon told. Sir John Malcolm was chosen to go to Persia a second time; the Home Government had meanwhile appointed Sir Harford Jones for the same purpose. Minto wrote in March 1808 that it was essential to find out in advance whether Persia could be got to resist the French : if so, the Company could spare twenty or twenty-five thousand men to help her.² Malcolm reached Bushire in May, found Persia under strong Franco-Russian influence, made the mistake of adopting a hectoring tone, broke off discussions, came home, and persuaded Minto to occupy the island of Karrack.³ But the despised Jones ("Sir Harford Jones is, I confess, rather a Marplot"⁴, Minto had written) dashed into the breach, arrived at Teheran in January 1809, found French influence much abated and secured a treaty.⁵ Elphinstone left Delhi in October 1808, and made his leisurely way to Peshawar by Multan. Shah Shuja displayed little zeal against "the Corsican wretch" (as Metcalfe used to call him⁶), and it complicated matters for Elphinstone as for Metcalfe, that Afghans and Sikhs distrusted each other more than either of them could be expected to distrust the French.⁷ But Shuja's government was threatened with rebellion : Seton was within the mark in describing his affairs as "in a very unpromising state".⁸ He signed an anti-French treaty mainly in the hope of obtaining British help against his own subjects; in June, while it was being ratified at Calcutta he was defeated and expelled from his kingdom.

After some preliminary contact, a Bombay civilian arrived in Sindh in August 1809 and negotiated a treaty excluding French agents from the

¹*Ib.*, No. 27. 10th October, 1808.

²Kaye, *Life of Malcolm*, I. 409—11.

³*Ib.*, 419.

⁴*Ib.*, 411.

⁵For the text of this treaty see Aitchison. *op. cit.* VI. 386.

⁶Kaye, "Life of Lord Metcalfe", I. 161.

⁷Ranjit was still nominally, since investiture of Lahore by Shah Zaman, a vassal of Afghanistan.

⁸Seton to Lt.-Col Carey, Military, Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief 22nd May 1809, R. O. IV. 104,

country. The Sikh chief cared nothing about it and the Company by that time, very little.¹ The grand "diplomatic offensive" planned by the Indian Government, in short, came to very little. In conception and success, it was on a par with British diplomacy of the same years in Europe.

II. OPENING OF THE MISSION

Metcalf left Delhi on July 28 with a clerical staff and a small escort² and on August 22 arrived at Patiala, where Imam-ud-din one of Ranjit's advisers, had been deputed to welcome him,³ possibly as a hint that Patiala was to be regarded as part of the new Sikh Empire. On the way the envoy learned that Ranjit Singh had acknowledged his appointment very cordially. He had always desired, the Raja wrote to Seton, "to show favour and kindness to all—to protect the poor and helpless from oppression,—and to cultivate the friendship of great and powerful Sardars, but more especially that of the Chiefs of the British nation in whom every virtue is to be found, and whose love of justice is well known;" and he regretted that he had not been able to come to Hardwar and meet Metcalfe there.⁴ The journey was painfully slow, roads being choked with mud. Bhanga Singh of Thanesar sent his young son and a wakil, to ask Metcalfe to keep his interests in sight at Lahore: the envoy suspected, however, that Bhag Singh, Bhai Lal Singh, and Chain Singh (D'wan of Patiala) were in Lahore for the purpose of stirring up the Raja's mind against him: he was determined to be firm, and "warn them of the natural consequences of incurring the displeasure of the British Government".⁵ Seton also, a little later, found reason to suspect Bhai Lal Singh. He had seen a letter of Bhag Singh accusing Bhai Lal Singh of trying to convince

¹For the treaty with Sind, see Aitchison, *op. cit.*, VI. 272. The four articles contain only 68 words in all.

²Metcalf's clerical staff included a munshi, Maulvi Hafiz-ud-Din, whom he had known for years and had great confidence in, at Rs. 200 per mensem, and five clerks, whose salaries totalled Rs. 235. Metcalfe, No. 27, 10th October, 1808.

³Seton to Carey, 25th October, 1808, R. O. IV. 43.

⁴Seton to Metcalfe, 6th August, 1808, R. O. IV. 30. with cop of Ranjit's letter.

⁵Metcalf No. 7, 18th August, 1808.

Ranjit that the British meant to annex Lahore : Bhag Singh was afraid of being held implicated himself.¹ At Patiala Metcalfe was able to view Ranjit's "favour and kindness to all" through the eyes of its Raja Sahib Singh, whose uncle came out to receive him, and compelled him to break his journey. On the 24th there was a public interview, when the distracted Chief begged the envoy to receive and hand back to him the keys of his fort, as a symbol of protection by the British Government. His visitor found this embarrassing, having nothing to offer. "I observed", he reports, "that such a ceremony was quite unnecessary, that his State had been long established and had never been dependent on the British Government...At the same time I endeavoured to assure him that the British Government entertained the most friendly sentiments towards him."² Pushing forward, Metcalfe learned that Ranjit had come to Qasur, south of Lahore, near the Beas, and one of the periodical rumours was spreading between the Sutlej and Jamuna that he was about to embark on a foray there. Metcalfe tried to convince himself that Ranjit was not going to treat the Mission in so derisory a style ; but Imam-ud-din, who was conducting him, seemed to know no more of the Raja's intentions than he did, and the Raja was "notorious for an unsteady and whimsical disposition."³ He got a letter, inviting him to meet his opponent at Qasur ; as it was on his way, he made no demur, but was anxious to ascertain what Ranjit was doing there.⁴ Imam-ud-din tried to soothe him with the argument that a muster of troops at Qasur had been decided on long before, and was probably aimed against Multan and Bahawalpur.⁵ But popular feeling was that Ranjit did not wish to let the Mission see his chief towns by receiving it there, a motive that Metcalfe thought childish, but perhaps real. He had sent a man ahead to Lahore for news, but the latter was afraid to go further than Qasur ; the only despatch sent by him was intercepted. A little later another agent he was

¹Seton to Metcalfe, 26th September 1808, R. O. IV. 37.

²Metcalfe, No. 8, 24th August, 1808.

³Metcalfe, No. 9, 25th August, 1808 ; see also Kaye, *Life of Metcalfe*, I. 179.

⁴Metcalfe, No. 11, 2nd September, 1808.

⁵Metcalfe, No. 12, 4th September, 1808.

to the British, but Ranjit Singh's Pao, was arrested.¹

Early on September 1, Metcalfe crossed the Beas; Sikh troops were everywhere on all sides. He thought it a demonstration meant to impress him, but a number of things turned to more practical ends later.² On the 10th he had five miles from Ranjit's camp, to settle the details of the reception; next day he was conducted to a camp near Ranjit's by Latch Singh, the Diwan Mokhum Chand, and other leaders. On the 12th he paid his first visit to the young conqueror. The reception was not all he desired, but his insistence on forms had had some result. Ranjit came out from his private enclosure, embraced the gentlemen of the Mission, led them in, and placed them and his Sardars on chairs collected with some difficulty for the occasion. The interview was fairly long, without touching on business. Ranjit was not in a talkative mood. The usual presents were bestowed. Metcalfe got an elephant, a horse, pearls and shawls.³ But the Mission was crowded into an old river bed, till rain drove it out, with spies swarming through the camp and guards watching from the banks; and Metcalfe found himself, he wrote, "on the point of being exposed to the disgrace of suffering distress from the want of money because the bankers did not dare to supply me in consequence of the Raja's orders."⁴ Metcalfe's next report, understandably, was in no optimistic vein. He felt that whatever ceremony Ranjit was lending to his reception was merely designed to impress his own people with the sight of their Ruler waited on by British envoy. He was thinking of magnifying himself, not of showing gratitude for the favour bestowed. "I have been obliged to require many attentions, which ought to have been pressed upon me." The youthful envoy was on his own dignity as well as his Government's: for Ranjit, the formal details prescribed by his visitor's diplomacy must have been puzzling enough. He discussed each of them solemnly with his chiefs, and Metcalfe thought he had already detected what was to be his main complaint hence forward—that trouble was being stirred up by divers cis-Sutlej and Punjab chiefs,

¹Metcalfe, No 23, 26th September, 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 15, 13th September, 1808; Kaye, *Life of Metcalfe*, 1. 180.

³Metcalfe, No. 23, 26th September, 1808.

⁴Metcalfe, No. 16, 15th September, 1808.

“goaning under the usurped despotism, who dare not make any attempt to throw off the yoke, but would be glad to bring upon him (Ranjit) the enmity of the British Government, that they might escape from his tyranny, and see his downfall.” At present, Metcalfe felt that the mischief was being kept in bounds by “the better suggestion of the Raja’s own judgment.” But suspicion was evidently rife. No one was allowed to pass between the two camps. Several chiefs sent word that they would pay a visit if they dared. Rani Sada Kaur, Ranjit’s mother-in-law conveyed a wish to open a secret communication.¹ A packet that reached him had been opened. Ranjit, “taught to regard the British Government as his natural enemy, the obstacle to the extension of his conquests”, would like to see the Mission come to a speedy end ; he might easily fancy that it, and Captain Mathews’ late journey, had been designed to spy on his resources, or even that its object was to form a party against him among his own chiefs. Metcalfe, therefore, felt it his first duty to win the Raja’s confidence.² The chiefs had advised their master that it would be beneath his dignity to return a visit ; so Metcalfe sent a munshi with an invitation, which was accepted.³ The visit took place on the morning of the 16th, and passed off so well as to leave Metcalfe in high spirits. The Raja, who was presented with two fine elephants and other gifts, talked “with great ease and affability, principally on military subjects...He spoke with great respect of the British troops, and observed of the Mahratta Army which he had seen in this country, that it contained great numbers, but that it wanted union and command. He illustrated this with an anecdote about Holkar’s troops, asked questions about British artillery practice, and desired to see the mission escort manoeuvre.⁴ Much cheered, Metcalfe judged it time to proceed to business, though it was discouraging that the cis-Sutlej chiefs, who had leave to visit him next day, were detained by guards, and when ~~they arrived~~ Imam-ud-din dropped in to overhear what passed.” ~~Metcalfe sent~~

¹Metcalfe, No. 23, 26th September, 1803.

²Metcalfe No. 16, 15th September, 1803.

³*Ib.*

⁴Metcalfe, No. 17, 17th September, 1803.

⁵Metcalfe, No. 23, 26th September, 1803.

Imam-ud-din (who lived in his camp) to propose a start of business. The diplomat returned in the evening with his brother Aziz-ud-din and a note which abruptly dashed Metcalfe's hopes. It remarked perfunctorily that it was difficult to weary of intercourse among friends, but made it clear that the Raja now had something better to do with his time. "This extraordinary document", the angry recipient wrote home, "gave me notice in a plain manner, that I was expected to take leave in three or four days...and in, I suppose, an unprecedented manner, evinced a design to shut the door against all intercourse." Metcalfe restrained his indignation, and wrote back calmly, still hoping to cure the Raja of his "unwarrantable jealousy :'" friendship between their States had been founded in Lord Lake's time, and the Raja's letter to Lord Minto on his coming to India had fortified it. His message would be delivered next day. Ranjit's reply was also cooler, and it now occurred to Metcalfe that the first note must have been dictated in a momentary passion, due to a report having been circulated that the Mission was bound for Kabul, and was only calling on him by the way.¹ On the 19th Metcalfe waited on the Raja. Proceedings were marked by "the greatest good humour", and "much friendly conversation on various subjects", though nothing definite came up. To remind the Raja of his own suggestion of an alliance in the letter conveyed by Captain Mathews, Metcalfe read to him the Governor-General's reply, to which he listened closely ; he seemed disappointed that its terms were so vague. On being taxed with his suspicious attitude, he appeared confused, but denied any unfriendly intentions. Metcalfe insisted that he must above all "root out mistrust from his mind, and understand the real character of the British Government", instead of listening to misrepresentations. Those present, who included the chief councillors, Diwan Mokhum Chand, Prabhdial (Fateh Singh's agent), Aziz-ud-din and Imam-ud-din, clearly expected to hear some definite declaration, and were all agog for it, but Metcalfe made it plain that he must be first assured of enough time for negotiation in a friendly atmosphere, and kept his proposals in his pocket. He was feeling, however, that he must come to the point soon, for Elphinstone would soon be

¹Metcalfe, No. 18, 18th September, 1808.

leaving Delhi for Kabul, and Ranjit with his anti-Afghan feelings would be extremely suspicious of that Mission unless he were first offered some definite terms. Metcalfe felt other apprehensions : "he may not give credit to the information upon which the proposed Negotiation is founded which will certainly be new to him, and may conceive that the whole is a fabrication for purposes dangerous to him."¹ In this wild encampment the bogey of Napoleon could not look so convincing as in the dining-rooms of Calcutta and Delhi.

On the evening of the 20th, three councillors came to say that the Raja's movements would depend on the nature of the Envoy's communication. Metcalfe promised to come next day and open the matter. A little daunted, perhaps, at the prospect of having to harangue a council of Panjabis on a theme to them so abstract as the niceties of European politics, he asked them to warn their master that "he would hear matters of which he had hitherto had no conception, and in which the interests of his state were deeply concerned."

The interview, thus mysteriously heralded, was delayed by a storm, and took place at 5 p. m. on the 22nd. The same councillors were present, with Mith Singh and others. Metcalfe prefaced his oration by emphasising the friendliness of his Government, and then plunged into his subject. "His Lordship had received authentic advices that the French who were endeavouring to establish themselves in Persia, had formed the design of invading these countries and of seizing Kabul and Punjab...His Lordship's first care was to give warning to those states which this intelligence concerned...These measures had been adopted by the Governor-General in the honest spirit of friendship...It was quite evident that the interests of all the states in this quarter required that they should unite in defence of their dominions and for the destruction of the enemies' armies."

The speech might have been improved by a survey of the French Revolution and its principles, and an account of why England and France

¹Metcalfe, No. 19, 20th September, 1803.

had come to war. But that would have brought up the Principle of Jeetunacy, and to tell Ranjit that England was fighting to restore all territories to their rightful blue-blooded and anointed owners would have been futile. It is not easy to guess what the listeners were thinking. They must have been wondering whether they were expected to take all this seriously, or whether these wicked Frenchmen were only the advance skirmishing of some more solid move on the part of the Governor-General. As the lecture concluded, the Raja gave signs of enthusiasm faithfully imitated by his assistants, which Metcalfe took to mark respect for his Lordship's kindly consideration, but which may really have marked surprise at so fabulous a beginning.

Ranjit's first question was how far the British army would advance, whether it was ready for action, and when the French might be expected. Metcalfe replied that the British army was always ready : that it would march beyond Kabul if necessary ; but that "the moment in which the enemy might be expected could not be at present ascertained." Ranjit seemed to think that in that case he could afford a little time to think things over, and after warmly expressing a willingness to co-operate, and satisfaction at the prospect of an alliance with England, "which had long," he said, "been the wish of his heart", he sent his councillors aside for discussion, and continued the talk in general terms. What if Shah Shuja joined the French ? Metcalfe said "it was improbable that he would be so blind to his own interests ; for that the French invariably subjugated and oppressed those who joined them, plundered and laid waste their country, and over-threw their Government." If Ranjit reflected that that was precisely what he did himself, and not he alone in India, he did not say so. He mentioned Holkar as another dubious element in the situation, and was assured that Holkar was now peaceable enough. Prabhkial now came up and whispered to Ranjit, and then informed Metcalfe that it was a large matter and would require time for deliberation.¹ Metcalfe was promised an answer next day, but felt no surprise at its non-arrival, reflecting that his communi-

¹Metcalfe, No. 20, 23rd September, 1808 ; Kaye, Life of Metcalfe, I. 186—8

cation "must have opened upon them entirely a new set of ideas, and disclosed new springs of policy." Late on the 23rd "the whole secret council", as he calls it, visited him, and the fatal disparity between the objects in view on both sides at once became apparent. The reply was that there could be no two ways of thinking about the French business ; but that the Raja, in the excess of his friendliness, wanted to go further, and "establish the strictest union between the two states, and put an end to the reports which were constantly circulated throughout the country, of approaching disputes between the British Government and the Raja." In plainer terms, what was wanted was "the acknowledgment of Ranjit Singh's sovereignty over all the Sikh Chiefs and Territories." Metcalfe, taken aback, replied that mutual, not one-sided, interests should be chosen as the basis for a treaty. The councillors referred to Ranjit's letter to the Governor-General, as standing in need of a clear answer on the question of his sovereignty. Metcalfe was not equipped to discuss the thorny problem of the Doab, and talk went on inconclusively. Aziz-ud-din brought it back to the point by saying that there were two objects: to settle the mutual frontier, and to make an alliance. Metcalfe pointed out "that the boundary of the Company's territories was fixed, and that there was no design whatever to exceed it", so that the only question was whether or not certain chiefs were under British protection. On being asked where the Company's immutable boundary was—a difficult question—he mentioned Karnal as its furthest point. Prabhdial hinted that Karnal had once belonged to an old friend of Ranjit, Gurdit Singh. Metcalfe, anxious to get back to the villainies of Napoleon, thought it time to check any such "extravagant notions" by making it clear that he had not come to discuss any cessions on the part of his Government. Mokhum Chand rejoined with another unwelcome remark, that the other British Mission should start for Kabul *after* an agreement with Ranjit had been reached. Metcalfe protested against their suspiciousness about the Kabul Mission. But he found it impossible to get the discussion running smoothly on its true French rails. "The other subject", he wrote sadly, "has been so long a favourite dream with the Raja, that it has engrossed his mind".¹ A Sikh in the Doab, to these practical men,

¹Metcalfe, No. 21, 24th September, 1808.

seemed better conversation than any number of Frenchmen in Persia.

Next evening they returned, to say that Ranjit wished to take his advice as a friend. Metcalfe, already by this time antagonised by their wrong-headedness, "had no objection to fall in with the humour of the farce." They wanted to find out from him what was the British Government's real policy in the Doab—a task in which they could hardly succeed, as he did not know, nor did the British Government itself. He extolled the moderation of his superiors, since the occupation of Delhi, in not exercising control between the Jumna and the Sutlej, but said that if Ranjit raised the matter formally with the Governor-General, the latter might be compelled to adopt a different attitude. This, it must be confessed, was not a very satisfactory sort of reply from a plenipotentiary. As to an alliance, Metcalfe said it must be purely defensive, but that if Ranjit had territorial claims on Afghanistan, the British Government was not likely to interfere with their prosecution; he hoped to hear that there would be no objection to Elphinstone passing through the Panjab to Kabul.¹ It may well have struck his hearers that it was an odd kind of triple alliance that the British Government had in contemplation, in which one pair of signatories were at liberty to be at war between themselves, and another pair did not know where their mutual frontier lay.

III—DIPLOMACY ON THE RUN

This discussion was quite cordial; but next morning Metcalfe was astonished to wake up and see the army moving off. Aziz-ud-din soon arrived, to explain that the Raja was going to the River Beas, and desired the Mission to follow. Metcalfe agreed to follow next day, but said he ought to know what Ranjit's intentions were.² Ranjit was carefully superintending his army over the river. Metcalfe sent a munshi to enquire his plans, and he admitted that his object was Faridkot (a possession, though mutinous, of Patiala), but said he would find leisure for discussion. The indignant Envoy, little relishing this

¹Metcalfe, No. 22, 25th September, 1808.

²*ib.*

species of diplomacy "on the run", sat in his tent and vented his feelings in a warm despatch to Calcutta. He rehearsed his grievances, and thought it might be wondered why he had not taken up a firm stand. "I confess, not without shame, that I did submit to it all, most tamely." His motive had been to win the Raja's confidence, and he had done all that lay in him. "I did not make enquiries concerning his Government, his country, his troops, or anything, connected with him...I repressed every feeling of natural curiosity, I suspended the progress of the measures that I had in contemplation for obtaining intelligence of affairs in Persia" (Nonetheless this most chaste of ambassadors acquired very positive opinions about Panjab affairs.) He had only remonstrated about Srinivas imprisonment, which led to a tardy release. As to the negotiations, Metcalfe "could not have desired a better opening"; but since then Ranjit had been brought to think that all the talk about the French was a trick, covering a design to annex his country. He could not bear the idea of an alliance between the British Government and Kabul; it might be advisable for Elphinstone to go by way of Bahawalpur.¹ Metcalfe left Qasur on the 27th, and next day caught up with Ranjit and visited him on an island in the river. As usual, Ranjit's talk left him with a fresh access of hope. Metcalfe used the plausible argument that with a treaty he would benefit if the French attacked him, and lose nothing if they did not. Ranjit could hardly deny this, "and expressed unequivocally his readiness to enter into a defensive alliance against the French, and any other powers that might be in league with them." But his mind soon came back to more mundane topics. He asked for a *perpetual* alliance between the two states; non-interference with the establishment of his authority over all Sikhs, and a free hand with Afghanistan. On the first point Metcalfe was encouraging, on the second he recommended a reference to the Governor-General, which Ranjit said he would make; on the third, he pointed out that a French advance would compel Lahore and Kabul to become allies. Ranjit, with conscious or unconscious humour, "admitted that it would be so, and said that when the danger might approach, he should be glad to

¹Metcalfe, No. 23, 26th September, 1808.

accommodate his differences with the state of Kabul, but that in the meantime he wished to carry on hostilities." Metcalfe, not quite certain whether he was saying too much, promised that the British would not interfere. Ranjit's affability increased, and Metcalfe proposed that they should settle a treaty now and minor points later. Ranjit promised to send representatives next day to arrange the articles.¹ But it was by now clear to Metcalfe that the cis-Sutlej question was to be pressed with "perseverance and anxiety", and he must have felt that his own ground was doubtful. He pointed out to his Government that Ranjit had already made great strides in that region, and the chiefs saw no means of checking him but British interference, which they were always trying, and with some success, to convince him would be forthcoming. In the meantime they were sitting on the fence. "On the part of the chiefs not yet avowedly his subjects, there appears to be no disposition to resist him by arms, no confederation, no principle of union." Those who had gone to Delhi and begged in vain for promises of support, had—with the exception of Bhagwan Singh of Jagadri—gone straight off to Lahore and had remained ever since in attendance on Ranjit. Several had virtually recognised Ranjit's sovereignty by receiving parts of his conquests from him. "These chiefs in his camp are as submissive as if they had long been used to his authority and discipline...But the same person would eagerly embrace any opportunity of joining a power that would defend them." It was evidently necessary for the British Government to make up its mind. If the decision was to call a halt to Ranjit, it would be hard to expect his friendship; he might be expected to join any anti-British league that might be formed, even if he did not fight at once. His suspicions against the British were obvious. When he mustered his army lately, it was currently said that he meant to attack them, and the rank and file of the army still believed this. Metcalfe had a strange letter from Fateh Singh, declaring that Ranjit's objective was Delhi. Now it was being put about that he had agreed to a request from the Raj of Bharatpur, backed by Holkar, for protection against Britain. Ranj

¹Metcalfe, No. 24, 30th September, 1808.

apparently encouraged, if he did not start, such tales.¹ It was at any rate believed in his camp that his present expedition would carry him to the Jumna, beginning with Faridkot and Batinda—the latter Patiala's strongest fort, whose fall would open the road to the heart of that state.² Faridkot surrendered without resistance on the 1st of October. The news created a great stir when it reached Delhi.³ Ranjit, as usual, assigned other lands for the support of the dispossessed owners—his aim, apparently, was to show his power rather than to drive his victims to desperation. Faridkot had long been in revolt against Patiala, so that its seizure was not viewed as an act of hostility towards Sahib Singh. Ranjit was encamped at Khai and Metcalfe joined him there on the 2nd. Ranjit had promised to remain there until the negotiation was concluded, and Metcalfe meant to spare no effort "to instil into his mind a conviction of the friendly disposition of the British Government." Now, however, he was met with a note saying that the Raja wished to inspect his new capture, and would like the Envoy to accompany him. Metcalfe congratulated his deputies on the conquest (a fact that shows strikingly how greatly the British standpoint differed at present from what it was soon to become), admitted Ranjit's right to go where he would, but said that these military movements made consecutive discussion impracticable; he therefore, asked that a place should be allotted where the Mission—which could not follow him on campaign without orders—could await his leisure. Ranjit wrote again, promising to stay at Faridkot for eight days and give them all to business. He, of course, wished his conquest to receive the public sanction of the British Envoys's presence. Metcalfe declined, with the observation that a hundred days would be too little if the Raja's mind were not free, otherwise *one* day would suffice. Disappointed, Ranjit rejoined sarcastically on the 3rd that he was glad to hear only one day was needed, and was waiting for proposals. Metcalfe, taken aback at this literalness, but "determined not to fail", told the deputies that he had already expounded his Government's views,

¹Metcalfe, No. 25, 1st October 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 24.

³Seton to Metcalfe, 15th October, 1808, R. O. IV. 42.

and at once handed them a draft treaty.

The deputies returned some hours later with an evasive reply, and refused the request to go to Ludlow, with solemn assurances that Ranjit would remain there till all was concluded. Metcalfe decided to give way on the point, taking the occasion to impress on them that his draft was based on mutual advantage, and should not be twisted in any one-sided manner. The war was good enough for Ranjit, who marched on the 4th from Lahore to Ludlow, Metcalfe following next day.¹ Negotiations were now pursued with some steadiness. Metcalfe's draft embraced three articles.

(1) Joint action against any French incursion.

(2) Military passage through the Punjab, and a military depot in the country, if it should become necessary to advance British troops beyond the Indus.

(3) A British post to be laid through the Punjab, for collection of intelligence about the countries beyond. (This article was Metcalfe's own idea).

They met on the 8th, and Ranjit handed over a counter draft, also in three articles—

(1) Perpetual amity ; no preference so be given by Britain to Shuja-ul-Mulk over Ranjit ; no interference by Britain with any operations of Ranjit against Bahawalpur or Multan.

(2) The treaty to be loyally observed in perpetuity.

(3) Ranjit to be acknowledged as the head of the whole Sikh nation ; Britain not to countenance and disaffected chief against him, or meddle with the traditions of the Khalsa.

The two drafts were very wide apart. Metcalfe answered in writing next day that Ranjit's first and third points would have to be referred to Government. He was reflecting that Elphinstone might be asked at

¹. Metcalfe, No. 26, 5th October, 1808.

Fort of Amritsar. The man was brought to Faridkot, but handed over to Ranjit, who wrote that the Amritsar priests had taken exception to a man, especially a Brahmin, being arrested in the holy city, and would not hear of his being handed over to the British : he had replied that he would stipulate that the offender should not be punished. Metcalfe said that he would be delighted to oblige the Raja by overlooking a fault in any servant of his own, but could not interfere with military law ; offering however, that the man should not be tried for his life—as he knew that absconding sepoys were only charged with absence without leave. Haggling went on, Ranjit maintaining that his priests and chiefs were pressing him, and he had to think of his prestige. Metcalfe was forced to agree to a compromise—that the man should be confined, pending orders from the Government. Privately he thought the argument about Amritsar was humbug ; it had been admitted “that the Raja’s soldiers would be punished for mutiny or desertion as much at that place as at any other.” The agents who helped in tracking the man down had been dismissed for their indiscreet zeal. Ranjit, he concluded, had been led astray by “his own unmanageable undignified pride”, and his “barbarous ignorance” of international etiquette.¹ It was only next month that the deserter was at last handed over, and then he promptly escaped. Metcalfe was tired enough of the affair by then to let it drop.²

Meanwhile the Sikh troops were levying contributions on villages near about, and their master was wondering whether Batinda might not be too hard a nut to crack : Sahib Singh, however, seemed willing to pay a contribution to avoid having his country ravaged. Another project was an attack [on the Bhatti country (west of Delhi) : Ranjit even consulted Metcalfe about this. The latter tried to pass it off as a joke, but suspected that mischief-makers were hoping to push the Raja into some exhausting conflict, or into friction with the British. Then Ranjit decided to march to Maler Kotla. Again the Mission accompanied him, arriving on the 22nd.³ The local chief, Ataulla Khan—“a venerable and

¹Metcalfe, Nos. 28 and 29, 14-15th October, 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 34, 4th November, 1808.

³Metcalfe, No. 30, 20th October, 1808.

much respected Patan chief"¹—called on Metcalfe to beg relief from the levy of a lac of rupees that was being placed on him. The envoy could offer him no comfort.² At Delhi the Resident learned from the Patiala *akhbar* of his peripatetic colleague's whereabouts, and was despondent about prospects with Ranjit, considering him "so very restless and unsteady that it is almost impossible to form a true judgment as to his real plans or probable movements. Not even the chiefs of his own tribe place the smallest reliance upon his promises or assurances. Raja Sahib Singh of Putteeala, his near relation, who in point of rank is considered to be the principal Sikh Chief, labours at this moment under the most cruel anxiety and alarm, lest Ranjit Singh in violation of the most solemn assurances to the contrary should attack his usual place of residence. Such is Sardar Ranjit Singh. Should he even enter into the proposed treaty with the British Government it is to be wished that he may keep better faith with it, than he has been in the habit of observing with the Chiefs of his own persuasion."³ Metcalfe, Seton felt, was struggling ably against crushing difficulties.⁴

On the 23rd a paper was brought to Metcalfe, containing remarks on his draft treaty, which revealed unallayed suspiciousness. The proposed alliance, it was stated, would be expensive to Lahore, but friendship would be allowed to prevail over economy. But there was not enough grain in the Panjab for depots to be established; British armies should advance only with the concurrence of Lahore; they should follow a route to be prescribed by Lahore, and eschew plundering; temporary depots might be created near the Indus, under Sikh management; the British Government should not listen to any designing enemies of the Raja.⁵ The deputies harped especially on this last point. Metcalfe returned an answer next day; the British armies would pay for their

¹Colonel Ochterlony to Government, 9th February, 1809, R. O. X. 6; printed in P. G. R., No 20.

²Metcalfe, No. 31, 26th October, 1808.

³Seton to Carey, 31st October, 1808, R. O. IV. 47.

⁴Seton to Carey, 25th October, 1808. IV. 43.

⁵Enclosure I in Metcalfe, No 32, 30th October, 1808.

stores, and never plundered : they would follow any route, prescribed, if only it led to the scene of action ; complete harmony was essential, and the "want of confidence" shown was regrettable ; it would be idle for intriguers to think of disturbing the relations between the states.¹ On the same evening a remarkable interview took place. Ranjit had determined "to muster all the forces of the Council and to make a grand attack, with a view", Metcalfe reported, "to confound me, and to extort from me the desired concession." All eight ministers present were eager to impress their master with their zeal. The object was—after a preliminary bout over the details of anti-French operations—the grand one of Ranjit's sovereignty over the Sikh nation ; or, as Metcalfe put it in his next despatch, 'an acknowledgment of his right to subjugate and oppress according to his pleasure all the independent Sikh Chiefs on our Frontier.' The ministers urged that the envoy had full powers, and should give a bold assent. When Metcalfe observed that so sweeping a proposal would presuppose very firmly established mutual confidence, the Raja took up the argument, and kept the leading part to the end, always in a civil tone.

No doubt, he said, the envoy's despatches had satisfied his Government that such a state of confidence existed. Not at all, replied Metcalfe, frankly ; he had described the Sikh attitude as one of jealousy and suspicion. Ranjit with equal frankness, defended himself with the statement, "it had always been reported that the British Government entertained the design of taking the Panjab."—There were similar rumours of designs on his part, but the British ignored them, replied the envoy. The councillors remarked that the British, being so strong, could afford to do so. Only, Ranjit continued, the reluctance to recognize his supremacy over the Sikhs left any doubt in his mind of British sincerity, and it was a little thing to ask, as all his people acknowledged him already. Then why agitate about it, enquired Metcalfe ; it must in any case be referred to the British Government. The Raja said his people were wondering what he had gained out of six week's negotiations. Metcalfe replied, with some warmth, that it was he who might well be asked that question.

¹Enclosure II in ditto.

Efforts were then made to scare him with the alleged anti-British temper of the army chiefs and leading men ; and to induce him to use his influence with his Government to procure the reward that the Raja would, consequently, be entitled to for meeting his wishes. Metcalfe said this would be useless, and the Rajas best course would be to give evidence of a really cordial attitude. A suggestion was started that he should return to Calcutta with some chiefs as Vakils. He "took the liberty of treating this as a humorous proposal."¹ Next day—the 25th—some of the councillors came with a fresh note which Metcalfe answered verbally. Most of the points were trivial ; he promised that British troops in the Pahjab should kill no cows, but could not so readily meet the contention that his referring their proposals to Calcutta showed a want of that confidence he expected to find on their side.² In discussion, they harked back to their former notion, that a mere treaty of amity should be signed now and an anti-French treaty after a favourable reception of Ranjit's wishes at Calcutta. Metcalfe argued that there should be no question of any higgling, conditional arrangement ; if they were ready for an anti-French compact the British Government would be pleased ; if not, let them say so ; the scheme was essentially in their own interest, for the invader would certainly conquer their state if they lacked British assistance. It came out that the Raja now wanted to move to Ambala ; they assured Metcalfe that if he went there all would be as he desired. He had heard that story before, and said it was no use—the Raja's mind was evidently not at leisure for this matter.

On the 26th Aziz-ud-din came to say that Ranjit was remaining another day to conclude the business, and to ask for a fresh draft to be discussed finally in conference. Metcalfe handed over a draft, but the conference was several times postponed.³ Metcalfe was by now convinced that Ranjit was merely spinning things out utilizing the presence of the Mission to impose himself the more easily

¹Metcalfe, No. 32, 30th October, 1808.

²Enclosure III in ditto.

³Metcalfe, No. 33, 1st November, 1808.

on these districts "a considerable degree of unworthy cunning." The envoy felt that he had let himself be drawn step by step into this pitfall against his instructions and his better judgment, in his eagerness to affect an agreement; and now the only thing he could do with dignity was to ask for a place where he could wait until the Raja had concluded his operations in the field.¹ On the 23th the councillors came with a renewed request for him to go to Ambala, on the ground that Ranjit had made repeated halts for his benefit. Metcalfe denied this, brought up all his grievances about the delays, and insisted on having a place assigned where he could await the Raja's leisure. Sorrowfully, they acquiesced, and named Fatehgarh Gongrana. Metcalfe admitted that they could, if they chose, postpone the question of a treaty until Government had pronounced on their wishes; but advised them that it would be to their interest to sign a treaty now, for to appear to attach conditions might create a painful impression; besides, if the Raja was so anxious to hear the Government's declaration, he ought not to push on his present operations in anticipation of it.

The Raja sent for him next day, and showed him a memorandum of conditions to be submitted to his Government—the same as those in the Note of the 23rd, with a novel demand that no Sikhs should be accepted in the British Army. Metcalfe deprecated the direct communication of such a paper, and it was withdrawn for consideration. Aziz-uddin, who called next morning at the discreet hour of sunrise, told Metcalfe that he and a few others were advising the Raja to fall in with his wishes, but the rest, including all the Sikh chiefs who had been consulted, were saying that no concession should be made until the British Government had assented to what was asked of it. Metcalfe advised him to give his master a hint that these chiefs had their own motives for desiring a rupture. In the evening a group of councillors came. Metcalfe dwelt feelingly on the advantages of the alliance to their country. Bhawari Das, after asking leave to speak candidly, said that all the advantages would really be with the British, for they would be the real object of a French invasion. Metcalfe who realized that that

¹Metcalfe, No 31 26th October, 1808.

was the general sentiment among them, remarked that they little knew the French character ; an invasion would certainly extinguish their independence. They protested that if it came to the point they would of course stand by the British—with “much abuse of the French character”, which Metcalfe “did not fail to promote.” On this farcial note the interview closed.

On the last day of the month Ranjit invited Metcalfe to hold a joint parade of their troopers ; he really desired, the envoy suspected, to show off his own skill with horse and matchlock, which turned out to be considerable. Next morning he marched for Ambala, leaving with Metcalfe a letter to be transmitted to the Governor-General.¹

IV. RANJIT'S CAMPAIGN AND BRITISH REACTIONS

Metcalfe spent November at Gongrana, a place whose recent history typified the prevailing anarchy. It was being besieged by Sahib Singh of Patiala and a group of confederate chiefs when Ranjit had snatched it up under their noses. He gave the fort to a favourite of his own ; some villages remained with the chiefs who had been attacking it, and two of them were still fighting over their shares. Ranjit wrote to Metcalfe during his stay, and civilly offered to send troops to destroy a village where a shot was (accidently) fired at or near him.² Metcalfe employed his leisure for private correspondence, for collecting his impressions of Ranjit's dominions, and for taking a general review of the diplomatic situation. His thoughts on the latter are interesting ; he knew that Government was considering the whole question, but not that its mind was already made up. His own conclusions pointed in a widely different direction from those adopted in Calcutta.

Ranjit, he wrote, desired some kind of treaty of amity, but was not clear in his own mind as to its details, and had not commented on his latest draft. A general defensive alliance with him might well prove a troublesome load ; it might involve the Company in perpetual warfare.

¹Metcalfe, No. 33, 1st November, 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 37, 20th November, 1808 ; Kaye, *Life of Metcalfe*, I. 197

Ranjit being so aggressive that a coalition of all neighbours against him was not unlikely. Hence it might be well to limit a defensive alliance to cases arising out of concerted policies.

But what Ranjit really aimed at, Metcalfe proceeded, was recognition of his sovereignty over the entire Panjab and all Sikh territories. And it seemed to the envoy that, if it was seriously desired to make a friend of him, this wish must be granted. After all, he had in fact been steadily absorbing the area between Jumna and Sutlej, retarded, and to a less and less degree, only by uncertainty as to the British reactions. His subjugation of all the Sikhs was now nearly complete, and Metcalfe presumed (here again we see what a suprising volte-face the British Government was making) that there was no intention of resisting it by force. If not, merely to withhold recognition would have no effect except to keep alive the Raja's distrust. It was not having any effect of heartening the chiefs to defend themselves ; they were going over to the conqueror's camp, to escape annihilation.

If, then, Ranjit's wishes were met, could he be reckoned on as a loyal friend ? His "total want of principle" placed a veto on any such sanguine hopes, "No part of his personal character presents any satisfactory assurance of cordiality, good faith, consistency or hearty co-operation. For want of consistency and good faith he is justly notorious . . . he has no regard for truth and can descend even to the violation of a solemn promise." "If ever the agents of French intrigue should find a way to his ear he is a character well suited to them. He would probably soon fall under the guidance of a French negotiator". (A Frenchman would win him with flattery, Metcalfe thought, but this seems to be attributing quasi-magical powers to French, as compared with British diplomacy.) None the less to gain a treaty now would offer certain advantages, It would, for instance, open the road to Kabul for British diplomacy; Afghanistan might be added to the alliance. Such measures, "having completely anticipated the designs of France in this country, a progressive connection will be formed with Ranjeet Singh, which may not only entirely exclude French intrigue from his councils, but may lead to his

Ignorant of the decision already taken in Calcutta Ranjit during November triumphantly on progress through the disputed territory. He took Shahabad, and the possessions of the widow of the Ambala chief, laying hands on all valuables in the town and assigning parts of the land to his favourites. Awed by this stroke, the Cis-Sutlej chiefs hastened to offer homage, with the exception of Sahib Singh of Patiala and Bhanga Singh of Thanesar, who were jointly collecting forces. As usual when he met with resistance, Ranjit temporised. But he had no need of force.¹ On November 14, an order was sent from Calcutta to Lieutenant-Colonel Ochterlony, later Resident at Delhi, now commanding at Allahabad, to go to at once to Delhi to take command of an expeditionary force being collected to advance to the Sutlej and see the Government's wishes carried out.² On the 22nd Seton wrote to Metcalfe that he had received a copy of the new instructions, and orders to inform the Cis-Sutlej chiefs that they were to be taken under British protection.³ Two days later Sahib Singh met Ranjit at Laknour, and exchanged turbans with him in solemn testimony of fraternal feelings.

Ranjit's completion of his Cis-Sutlej programme therefore, coincided with the British Government's determination to annul it. Seton was so in hopes that no great harm had been done.⁴ In reply to his notification of British protection, Sahib Singh wrote in the most grateful terms. When Metcalfe reached Qasur, he said, "confidential people" had despite Ranjit's prohibition of access to him, been able to remind him of the sad position of Patiala. Metcalfe, who could have prevented Ranjit from crossing the Sutlej, had answered that he could offer no help, and the writer had then despaired. Most of the chiefs had gone to wait on the conqueror. From Shahabad Ranjit had sent to desire an interview. He had been reluctant, but everyone thought it useless to refuse, now that the British Government had sent a mission

¹Metcalfe, No. 37, 20th November, 1803. Griſſin, op, cit., 103.

²Government to Ochterlony, 14th November, 1803, R. O. VI. 1 ; printed P. G. R., No. 1.

³Seton to Metcalfe, 12th November, 1803, R. O. IV. 54.

⁴Seton to Government, 7th December, 1803, R. O. III. 1.

to make friends with Ranjit. Hence they had met at Laknour, in the presence of "Baba Sahib Bedy Sahib Singh Jee, the revered descendant of Baba Nanak." Only fear of violence had induced him to agree to the exchange of turbans. He had spent laes on raising troops, and was afraid he could not bear the burden much longer.¹ The Resident in return assured Sahib Singh (quite erroneously) that had Metcalfe known what troubles were about to overtake Patiala, no doubt he would have spoken differently the British Governments' wish was to see every ruler enjoying his independence in perpetuity.² Seton further tried, he reported to his Government, to insinuate a contrast of "the liberal, generous policy of the British Government with the ambitious, oppressive, tyrannic conduct of Ranjit Singh."³ The Raja of Patiala, responded even more fulsomely,⁴ and Seton hoped there would now be end of any wavering in his mind, though intrigues in Ranjit's favour on the part of Bedi Sahib Singh might make some trouble; on the whole Seton thought that all the Cis-Sutlej chiefs would be ready to contribute a subsidy to the British expeditionary force. He had conveyed Government's intentions also to Bhag Singh and Bhanga Singh, the only two of note who were not now with Ranjit.⁵ Bhag Singh assured him in reply that he and his friends were still sound at heart;⁶ Bhanga Singh explained that it was the sending of a friendly Mission to Ranjit that had robbed them of hope, and that Sahib Singh had been inveigled into the late interview by interested parties; the British Government ought to watch over the region more vigilantly than heretofore.⁷ Seton replied that they had misunderstood the Mission (Metcalfe's despatches show that they were in reality not far from the mark)—it was meant to strengthen the friendship) between the Company and Lahore

¹Seton to Government 7th December, 1808, R. G. III. 1-enclosure I, Sahib Singh to Seton.

²Ditto, enclosure II, Seton to Sahib Singh.

³Ditto.

⁴Sahib Singh to Seton, enclosure I in Seton to Government, 17th December, 1808, R. O. III. 2.

⁵As 3.

⁶Ditto, enclosure III, Bhag Singh to Seton.

⁷Ditto, enclosure V, Bhanga Singh to Seton.

but also to promote the security of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs.¹ Bhanga Singh wrote again to say that "the state of the country becomes worse and worse every day", and that Britain must save them.² Seton admired this diehard, the only one who had defied Ranjit, as a brave soldier.³ The Resident wrote to Metcalfe that evidently "Sahib Singh was impelled by terror to take that injudicious step" at Laknour, and might be expected to welcome the British advance; he enquired, however, whether Metcalfe thought that Sahib Singh would now feel bound to affect a dislike of the British force passing through his territory, and whether Ranjit now felt he had Patiala under his thumb.⁴ Metcalfe's opinion was that there was little to fear; the Patiala representative with Ranjit had told him as much; the Sikhs in general seemed little impressed by the Laknour transaction.⁵

V. BRITISH DEMANDS ON RANJIT

In the latter part of November Metcalfe received his new instructions. Ranjit was on his way back, and Metcalfe suspended the immediate communication of an ultimatum, in the hope that moderation might prevail in the Sikh councils; this fell in with a subsequent order from Calcutta, softening the proposed ultimatum, and announcing that an alliance with Ranjit was now thought useless; the envoy should spin things out until Ochterlony was ready for action.⁶ Thus the business of the Mission was now entirely changed; and it was now Metcalfe, rather than Ranjit, whose aim was to waste time. The Raja hurried towards Amritsar "almost unattended", making and breaking two appointments with Metcalfe on the way. He had not seen his favourite dancing girl Moran for three months.

¹ Ditto, enclosure VI, Seton to Bhanga Singh.

² Bhanga Singh to Seton, enclosure II in Seton to Government, 17th December, 1808, R. O. III. 2.

³ As. 5, p. 26. See also on these transactions Griffin, op. cit. 93-5.

⁴ Seton to Metcalfe, 3rd December. 1808, R. O. IV. 55.

⁵ Metcalfe to Seton, 9th December, 1808, R. O. II. 94.

⁶ Kaye, op. cit., 198-200.

Metcalfe followed to Amritsar, armed with a letter from the Governor-General to Ranjit calling on him to surrender his recent conquests.¹ This letter gave him great satisfaction. The Raja "gave me the slip", he wrote, but he was "in full chase, and now long to administer the dose that I have ready for him. I shall have a selfish gratification in paying him for all the uneasiness that he has caused to me." This was in a private letter to headquarters, which reveals again, and more clear than anything else, how utterly unexpected was the change of policy at Calcutta. Metcalfe found, he said, that a more spirited line was wanted from him than he had yet followed, and he desired to explain himself more freely than was possible in an official despatch. Ranjit's conduct had offended Government. "I leave you to imagine the feelings of disappointment, annoyance, and disgust, which it produced in me on the spot." Had he only had his immediate objects to consider, he would have broken off negotiations promptly. But he had to think of the Kabul Misson also ; if he broke off Elphinstone might not be allowed to pass through the Panjab. Also, he had hoped that Ranjit might be brought to a better temper. "I could not forget that I had been sent to establish an alliance and not to bring on a war." His despatches must have suggested that he had allowed Ranjit to hope for a recognition of his Cis-Sutlej claims. Re-reading them he perceived "a tamenses" he had not been conscious of at the time. "My object was to get the convention of co-operation against the French, signed unconditionally." After that, the Cis-Sutlej claims could still have been rejected, "and if it had been resolved to follow up the refusal by taking advantage of any opportunity to assist the overthrow of his power, his conduct would soon have given an opportunity to get rid of any embarrassment which our engagements with him might have caused.....There was certainly an impression in my mind that Government was not prepared immediately to oppose Ranjit Singh's pretensions by arms, which was founded on the policy pursued in the three last years during which he had been allowed to make much progress, in effecting his purposes, and from your joint instructions, I conceived that Government wished to

¹Metcalfe, No. 42, 11th December, 1808.

have the question left without decision or discussion : although I thought it possible that Government might be induced by his abominable behaviour to oppose him, I was no confident of that." If, then, his "tameness" had given Ranjit encouragement to continue his depredations, he had clearly been guilty of a very grave miscalculation : but he doubted whether any such encouragement had been needed.¹ This is surely an illuminating epistol. Reservations and arriers promissces had not been on the Raja's side alone. The project of making an alliance with Ranjit had been embarked on in unconsider haste. There could be no genuine alliance which left such a problem untouched, and Ranjit was quite right in importing it into the negotiation. An alliance, moreover, entered in such a spirit of contempt, and with a determination not to let it stand in the way of a future attack on the ally, was an absurdity. The Company had grown too much accustomed to its system of "subsidiary treaties." It could not really conceive of a genuine treaty of alliance, as between equals, with any Indian power.

As to "protection" of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs, some of them had follow Ranjit home to beg a share in his spoils, and Bhai Lal Singh was trying borrow troops from him to seize some lands with. "It is not surprizing remarks the Envoy, "that Ranjit Singh should have gained an ascendan over chiefs actuated by such selfish and contending motives."

Ranjit had withdrawn his troops across the Sutlej except for a fe detachments at Ambala and elsewhere, and was giving himself up to eas Metcalfe reached Amritsar on the 10th and immediately waited on hi with the Governor-General's letter, "with the intention of presenting and observing its effect." Ranjit took it but did not read it ; he wa occupied with more amiable stimulants. "The evening was devoted t mirth and pleasure. I entered into the spirit of the scene as much as thought proper. I took an early opportunity of retiring : but the Raj and his friends were even then evidently incapacitated for business." Next day Metcalfe waited to learn the results of his bombshell ; as

¹Metcalfe, No. 2 (in RO. . V.), undated.

²Metcalfe, No. 42, 11th December 1808.

nothing happened, he sent a stiff note on the 12th. This gave Ranjit his first idea of what legal ground his rivals intended to take up. The Governor-General had learned, Metcalfe wrote, with "surprise and concern that the Maharaja aims at the subjection of chiefs who have long been considered under the 'protection' of the power ruling in the North of Hindoostan." Ranjit was reminded that in the Maratha War he had written to Lord Lake preposing the Sutlej as his boundary. The chiefs between the Sutlej and Jamuna had been released by the British Government from tribute and subserviency, but not with any intention of a third party being allowed to take advantage of this generosity.¹ The weakness of this claim, that Sirhind and Malwa were always to be regarded as within the sphere of influence of whatever power held Delhi, has been pointed out by N. K. Sinha, who remarks that Ranjit could appeal on his side not only to the unity of the Khalsa, but also to his grant of Lahore from Zaman Shah, preumabaly carrying with it a title to the areas south of Lahore that had been *de facto* under Afghan rule.² Applied to an epoch when the right of the sword was the only right, all such arguments are, however, academic. The right now claimed by the British Government over the disputed region was of a truly extraordinary nature ! It involved no control over the local rulers, who would, therefore, be free to attack Ranjit if they wished, without fear of retaliatisn. If the power holding Delhi really owed protection to them, then the British Government had been scandalously and consciously neglecting its duties for the past three years.

The Note was carried by Metcalfe's munshi, and read to Ranjit Singh in his presence. It came as a blow ; but Ranjit kept his self-control, and seemed to hope that the threat could yet be averted. He sent express to surmon Prabhdial, who had managed the negotiations of 1805 with the British for Fateh Singh.³ Aziz-ud-din called on the 13th, and declared that his master was gratified by the Governor-

¹ Enclosure in Metcalfe, No. 43, 12th December, 1808; Kaye, op.cit., 202; Griffin, op.cit., 109.

²M. K. Sinha, "Ranjit Singh", 44.

³Metcalfe, No. 43, 12th, December 1808.

General's message, because "friendly reproaches could only be made where regard existed." Metcalfe replied that he needed "a more detailed and satisfactory answer" ; and fearing that there was still a hope on the other side of evading the issue, he handed over a fresh note, reiterating the demand for restoration of all places seized since the coming of the Mission, and making it plain that "the decision announced on the part of the British Government was irrevocable." He agreed to the request that he should follow the Raja to Lahore. This time there was an excuse for Ranjit's restlessness : the whole town was in an uproar over the affair of the conversion of a Hindu to Islam, by the favourite Moran.¹

Ranjit left on the 14th, sending back word that at Lahore he would be quite free for business²—which turned out to be over-optimistic, as the Moran affair was there before him and the same scenes were repeated.³ Metcalfe visited the Amritsar Temple and made handsome presents to the priests, at a total expense of Rs. 2,605, "having reason to believe that a compliment from him to Temple would be acceptable to the whole tribe of the Sikhs."⁴ This also was over-optimism, for the money proved not long after to have been thrown away. Before leaving, he also picked up political gossip, and was able to indulge in a little diplomacy under the rose—Ranjit's efforts to cut him off from contact with his subjects do not seem to have been very effective. There was a rumour that Ranjit intended to accompany his army to Kangra, which was expected to be ceded to him by Raja Sansar Chand in return for aid against the Gurkhas. Expelling the Gurkhas was not thought to be much of a task, and the Raja liked to engross the credit of any enterprise "attended with eclat, and free from much danger of failure." If he was really thinking of bolting once more in this manner, commented Metcalfe, "his levity will exceed all that I have yet seen in him." Another rumour was that he meant to restore Ambala to the Rani Dya Kaur, in order to

¹Metcalfe, No. 44, 14th December, 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 45, 15th December, 1808.

³Metcalfe, No. 48, 18th December, 1808.

⁴Metcalfe No. 46, 15th December, 1808.

satisfy the British requisition without seeming to yield to threats. This, said Metcalfe (far from consistent in his dicta on the Raja's character), would accord with his "general prudent and saving policy."¹ Jaswant Singh was understood to be working creditably to promote this settlement about Ambala.² Of Fateh Singh, Metcalfe now heard from a reliable source that in case of a breach he was likely to stand by his old comrade in arms, Ranjit. Hitherto Metcalfe had supposed, on the authority of "men of observation and reflection", that Fateh Singh was eager to throw off the yoke and ally himself with the Company; now he was not so sure, and a mistake on such a point might well, he confessed, prove awkward. Rani Sada Kaur, on the other hand, let him understand that she had heard from her detested son-in-law of the British proposals, and that she would give the fort of Attalgarh and passage for troops in return for being restored to the possessions he had deprived her of. Metcalfe replied that he could not negotiate with her, but would notify his Government of her offer. He believed that Jodh Singh Ramgarhia, who had lands near Attalgarh, could also be reckoned an ally if it came to war.³

Metcalfe met Ranjit in Lahore on the afternoon of the 17th. The latter was far from being his jovial self. He tried to "maintain a lively conversation on general topics. He frequently, however, sunk into a reverie, and displayed in his countenance much care and thoughtfulness."⁴ Next day Imam-ud-din came, making the excuse for delay that the Raja found it indispensable to consult Mith Singh, and was anxiously awaiting him. Metcalfe asked why Mith Singh had been sent away from Amritsar if he were so indispensable, and complained that he was always played off between Raja and ministers, each saying they had to consult the other. To the argument that Ranjit had never known a check, and required indulgence, Metcalfe used language of very undiplomatic plainness, and asked Imam-ud-din to repeat it to the Raja

¹Metcalfe, No. 45, 15th December, 1808.

²*ib.*

³Metcalfe, No. 47, 15th December, 1808. .

⁴Metcalfe, No. 48, 18th December, 1808 ; Griffin., *op.cit*, 113.

along with his "regret, surprise, and impatience"—which he suspected his visitor was not likely to venture on doing.¹ Prabhdial and Aziz-ud-din came on the 19th, with the news that the indispensable Mith Singh had arrived, and that the Envoy should have his answer as soon as he should be at leisure. Metcalfe replied, paraphrasing Cicero, that he was always at leisure for business. He then "endeavoured to lead them to some deviation from the cautious silence, which had been preserved by all, since the delivery of the Governor-General's letter, but without any sufficient effect." Talk turned on the ill-treatment of the Mission on its first arrival. "The language used on this occasion was that of penitence, and excuses were offered, on account of the ignorance prevailing at the Raja's court regarding the laws established among civilized nations, which excuses were to a certain degree true, but not sufficiently so, as I observed to the Gentlemen, to justify the glaring improprieties that had been committed."

Next morning six ministers waited on Metcalfe, who "of course expected an ample communication from this committee of Privy councillors." Instead he only got an enquiry as to whether he was making a request or a demand. Metcalfe made it plain that he could not admit any discussion of the requisitions. He used the argument that by making a reference to the British Government on the Cis-Sutlej question, Ranjit had admitted the latter's right to lay down the law on it. He says that he got the ministers to agree to this argument, but it is a strange one. Ranjit had not asked the British Government to give him the Cis-Sutlej province, but to recognize him as having already sovereignty over it. Metcalfe knew that a British force was being sent to the Sutlej, and he now felt that nothing except its approach would force Ranjit to throw off the mask. "If", he wrote, "which seems to be not impossible, his suspicions of the design, and apprehensions of the consequences of advancing troops, should lead him to the desperate resolution of trying his destiny in a contest with the British Government, in preference to a quiet submission to that political destruction, which he may conceive to be the inevitable end of the approximation of the British arms and influence

¹Metcalfe, No. 49, 18th December, 1808

to his boundary—I continue to suspend the communication¹ of the proposed measures until I may have information that the state of preparation of the intended detachment render it expedient.”¹ On the 21st there was an interview with Ranjit and his council. Prabhdial and Aziz-ud-din, “with occasional elucidations, and remarks from the Raja,” made a long and full statement of their side of the case. Their argument in brief was that Ranjit had made two earlier expeditions across the Sutlej, each time on the invitation of a local chief; since then Mokhum Chand had carried out various annexations for him: the British had made no protest. Ever since coming into the north of Hindostan they seemed to have made clear their intention not to meddle in that region. Lord Lake had left not a single battalion on the Sutlej. Chiefs had gone to Delhi for help, and been ignored. Others had admitted Ranjit’s supremacy, and Delhi had been silent. Finally, “the Raja’s claims were established by the quantity of blood that had been spilt in his armies, and the money and labour expended, in his endeavours to introduce his authority.”

Metcalf replied at equal length and with more than equal dogmatism, “It was unnecessary...to prove the original right of the British Government when it became possessed of the power, formerly exercised by the Marhatta Government, in the north of Hindostan, to the political supremacy over the country between the Sutlej and the Jumna, as it has been fully admitted (by whom?), and was beyond doubt.” The British course had been quite consistent. The rights of overlordship had not been waived, and were now interposed because this had now become essential. Previously Ranjit had not been known to contemplate settled conquest; when chiefs had asked protection, it had not been deemed necessary. “With respect to the remark, that most of the Chiefs had formerly acknowledged his supremacy, I said that I had not heard of it; that the British Government had not heard of it; that if it had, it could not have agreed to it, and could not now pay any attention to it.” Voluntary or enforced, such submission was invalid.² Metcalf was making the best of his brief. But the arguments now used by the

¹Metcalf, No. 50, 20th December, 1808.

²Metcalf, No. 51, 22nd December, 1808.

Ra³a, were precisely the same as he himself had used before he learned of his Government's sudden change of policy. Kaye's account of the controversy is remarkable. "All that the wily Sikh could do" he tells us, "was to repeat oft-refuted arguments, and to put unprofitable questions...And Metcalfe answered plainly and firmly, with undeniable logic, that the British Government intended to take those principalities under its protection—an how could they be protected when the Raja threatened them with his armies, or had absolutely brought them under his rule?"¹ Ranjit might as well have announced that he intended to take Bengal under his protection, and have asked with equally undeniable logic how he could do that, when the British had absolutely brought it under their rule.

Ranjit did not say this, however ; he talked vaguely of a settlement honourable to both parties, and Metcalfe allowed the discussion to run on, in order not to seem "irritating or abrupt." When he did bring up the requisitions, Ranjit remarked that "as I had been sent expressly to confirm and increase the friendship subsisting between the two States, he had expected the complete accomplishment of all his views, that his disappointment was now very great : and that he could not refrain from observing, that it was an extraordinary kind of friendship that I had established." Metcalfe reminded him that he "had always deprecated the agitation of this question, which he had persisted in bringing forward. He assented to this, with good humour, and said that it was true." Ranjit asked in conclusion whether he was expected to give up his former conquest beyond the Sutlej, and was told that that demand was not made—yet.² Next day the rivals met again, and Metcalfe communicated the intention of the British Government to send a military force to the Sutlej. Ranjit may not have taken the requisitions quite seriously before ; at any rate, he now seemed more perturbed than the former news had made him. There was a protracted argument ; it ended in a promise to meet the British demands, but was followed

¹Kaye, *op.cit.*, 207.

²Metcalfe, No. 51, 22nd December, 1808.

the same evening by word that the Raja meant to leave for Amritsar.¹ Metcalfe was very angry. He wrote to Seton that this move might be very sinister, and it looked from Ranjit's tone, as if he were going to resist the British force.² News of the Raja's reactions had been eagerly awaited³, and on the arrival of Metcalfe's letter the military headquarters at Saharanpore ordered up reserves from Agra.⁴ Ranjit quickly gave up the idea of escaping to Amritsar.⁵ Negotiations were for some time carried on through Notes and through Metcalfe's munshi; "I do not entirely approve of it", he wrote, but "there is no satisfaction in personal conferences with the Raja."⁶ On Christmas Day Ranjit wrote that the communications from Calcutta "had excited his increasing astonishment he never could have expected this from friends." He suggested vaguely that the disputed area should revert to the *status quo ante* Metcalfe's arrival, the British Government suspending its measures, and should then be settled by mutual agreement.⁷ Metcalfe rejoined next day that the desire for friendship was equal on his side. But the Maharaja, since I represented those requisitions, had given orders to collect troops, although he had shortly before dismissed many to their homes." No explanation had been offered of this, and the excuse was being made for delay that the chiefs had to be consulted on the British march towards the Sutlej.⁸ On the 30th, Ranjit loudly assured the munshi that he would accept the British terms, and promised a full written agreement next day; but next day he sent Imam-ud-din instead to borrow a Persian book Metcalfe had picked up in Lahore, because he wished to look at the pictures. Imam-ud-din was told to hurry things up, and came back with the usual "to-morrow." On the 1st, assurances came that the compliance would be unconditional; on the

¹Kaye, op. cit., 208—11.

²Metcalfe to Seton, 24th December, 1808, R. O. II. 98.

³Seton to Carey, 18th December, 1808, R. O. IV. 59.

⁴Head Quarters, Saharanpur, to Seton, 30th December, 1808, R. O. II. 101.

⁵Metcalfe No. 54, 26th December, 1808.

⁶Metcalfe, No. 56, 3rd January, 1809.

⁷Metcalfe, No. 54, 26th December, 1808, enclosure II.

⁸Ditto, enclosure I.

2nd. orders for evacuation of Ambala were promised for next day; next day Metcalfe was left to reflect that "It is impossible unfortunately to place any dependence on what he says." Withdrawal from Ambala, Metcalfe also reflected, though it would open the way to the Sutlej for the British force, would be only partial compliance. Ranjit had defined acceptance of the requisition as "the withdrawing my troops from Umballa and the restitution of that town to its former possessor",¹ and made it a personal favour to the Envoy. Ranjit's Note of the 2nd continued with assumed heartiness, that the next step after Ambala should be a treaty of friendship: "every arrangement that may hereafter be projected in union for the defeat of the expected invasion shall be executed in concert." The munshi had promised that the details of the placing of a British force on the Sutlej should be settled in consultation with him: he hoped the same would apply to all future measures.² The munshi denied having said any such thing,³ and Metcalfe replied on the 3rd that the Sutlej post would be fixed by the British Government at its discretion, though if the Raja behaved well, his views on future questions would no doubt always be heard. The military preparations going forward in the Panjab, Metcalfe added, were inconsistent with friendship.⁴ On the whole Metcalfe was inclined to view the Raja's delays "as a last struggle to maintain that favourite object which he cannot part with without the utmost reluctance or as an attempt to blind the British Government until he shall feel himself prepared to assert those ambitious intentions which he may be determined to prosecute... I cannot regard his conduct as otherwise than hostile . . . I feel myself justified in supposing that he is determined to persevere in his present policy to which it is impossible for me longer to submit." Metcalfe wished to close his mission and leave. Then, if the British forces were ready for action, they could begin; if not—"the Raja's spirit of procrastination will favour any expedient delay." He had just

¹Metcalfe, No. 56, 3rd January, 1809.

²Ditto, enclosure I.

³Metcalfe, No. 57, 4th January, 1809.

⁴Metcalfe, No. 56, enclosure 2.

heard that his post of the 29th from Delhi had been intercepted and carried to the Raja : if this proved true, he could stay no longer after such a "gross violation of decency."¹ All this moralising over the hostile and aggressive spirit of Ranjit sounds well. But later documents show that the British Government's desire, if not intention, in sending troops to the Sutlej, was to deprive Ranjit of his kingdom, with or without bloodshed. The French menace was still the overriding consideration : only now that the Sikhs had been judged useless allies, the object was to get rid of Ranjit altogether to fear of his proving a tool for the enemy.

When Metcalfe wrote his next despatch, he was proposing to leave very soon. The Raja had written on the 4th, deploring the British suspicions of him, exhorting them not to be alarmed by his mobilisation, and saying that if a force should advance to the Sutlej without consultation with him, he would take it ill ; orders for abandonment of Ambala were ready--"Now the proposals of this Government will be brought forward, and it is certainly an obligation with you to comply with them."² But Metcalfe heard that a letter had been received from Mohkum Chand, advising resistance ; Mohkum Chand himself was expected, and the Raja would probably go on spinning things out till his arrival. Prabhdial, with whom the Mission kept in touch "through a private channel", sent a verbal message that he was pressing the Raja, with doubtful success, to give way, but that if it came to a rupture he and his master Fateh Singh would stand by the British. The munshi reported Ranjit as highly incensed with what he called the hectoring attitude of Metcalfe—perhaps with more justification than the latter was officially disposed to allow.³

VI. MILITARY PREPARATIONS

While this wrangling was in process at the Sikh Durbar, Ochterlony's general instructions were being drawn up at Calcutta in terms that

¹Metcalfe, No. 56.

²Metcalfe, No. 57, and enclosure.

³Metcalfe No. 57.

showed how little a submission on Ranjit's part could have restored the desire for alliance with him that had first sent Metcalfe to his court. The latter, it was explained, would be withdrawn as soon as the British force reached the Sutlej. It was now felt to be useless, even undesirable, to have an agent present with Ranjit. Ochterlony would therefore take his place as the channel of communication. The despatch proceeded : "Government although at present desirous of maintaining the relations of amity with the Rajah of Lahore is anxious to avoid incurring any obligation which may embarrass the prosecution of any system of measures eventually dictated by the exigency of the public interests. In any communications, therefore, which you may eventually hold with the Court of Lahore, you will be careful to withhold any declarations or propositions of a nature to impose such obligations on the British Government."

Ochterlony was to compel Ranjit's withdrawal from his late conquests. If any overtures should be made to him by disaffected subjects of Lahore he was to decline them for the present, with a hint that they might be welcomed later on, and inform Government. The precise relations to be entered into with the Cis-Sutlej chiefs would require later elucidation. It would be necessary to study their resources, and how they could be utilized for defence or for operations against Ranjit.¹ The Government's resolve to keep its hands free for war against Ranjit was here phrased with such extreme tact, that Ochterlony, much more a soldier than a diplomat, does not seem to have grasped its meaning. He enquired whether he could make any sort of treaty with Ranjit, if the latter should, as he expected, give way ;² also, whether Ranjit was to be made to give up, as strict justice required, his earlier Cis-Sutlej conquest as well.³ Seton, who was asked to co-operate with Ochterlony and help him in collecting data on which the exact future

¹Government to Ochterlony, 29th December, 1808, R. O. VI. 3 ; printed, P. G. R., No. 4.

²Ochterlony to Government, 16th January, 1809, R. O. X. 1 ; printed, P. G. R., No. 10.

³Ochterlony to Seton, 18th January, 1809, R. O. X. 2.

status of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs could be determined, was corresponding with the Commander-in-Chief on Maratha affairs. A renewed Maratha movement would be awkward, as it would take the British force from the flank.¹ Seton thought the danger remote. "From the evident dissatisfaction", he wrote, "with which Raja Ranjit Singh received the communication of the intention of the British Government it may fairly be inferred, that he does not mean to yield the demand of non-interference without a struggle : and from the studied delays which preceded his last message to Mr. Metcalfe, it certainly would appear, that he had it in contemplation to endeavour to connect himself with some of the native powers—It does not, however, seem probable, that in the event of his having opened any intrigues for this purpose. his attempts have been successful. Nothing on the part of Dawlut Rao Sindia indicates any sensation but what is most friendly towards the British Government. and my latest intelligence from Jaswant Rao Holkar, which is dated on the 19th ultimo, states that he still adhered to his intention of crossing the Nurbuddeh and proceeding to the Dukhen for the purpose of suppressing the troubles in that quarter. Amcer Khan was still with him."² Government wrote to Seton that the march to the Sutlej would not be cancelled under any circumstances. This was a plain indication of what, indeed, was not concealed in the despatches, that Ochterlony's advance was primarily a precaution against the French. Though protection of the chiefs against Ranjit—which had been refused them for three years—was thus only an incidental consideration, they were expected to show their gratitude in no half-hearted way. They might prefer to wait until Ranjit should again be immediately threatening them. But benefits must be mutual between allies, as between governments and subjects. They could not be protected free or *gratis*. The least they could do at present was to allow the British troops a passage through their territories. If any of them failed to see this, or showed sympathy with Lahore, plain language was to be used. Sahib Singh in particular

¹Government to Seton, 29th December, 1808, R. O. VI. 5 ; Printd, P. G. R., No. 5.

²Seton to Carey, 1st January, 1809, R. O. IV. 64.

must make up his mind to having a British post established in his territory.¹ On the 2nd of January Ochterlony left Delhi for Karnal, to await there his final orders. Seton thought from Metcalfe's despatches that immediate advance would be necessary. "It is satisfactory to reflect", he wrote, "that if the British Government should be forced into hostilities upon this occasion it is only to be imputed to the wild and unreasonable ambition of Ranjit Singh, and to his confirmed habits of outrage and oppression. It is no less pleasing to observe that notwithstanding his studied procrastination, and the intrigues which he probably practised during the interval, he seems at this moment to be without a friend or well-wisher among the chiefs of Hindostan, while discontents are said to prevail in his own country. It is, therefore, probable that, in the advance of an army from Karnal, the object of which is, not to destroy, but to protect, it will have the cordial good wishes of all the inhabitants."² Apart from the situation at Lahore, Seton considered swift action desirable because it was universally expected by the public at Delhi. The British demands on Ranjit were no secret from the public, and long delay in their enforcement would be bad for prestige. It might, besides, encourage Ranjit to resist, which was undesirable, because after a war he could scarcely be brought to a friendly frame of mind. In short, said Seton, he himself favoured prompt action to avert, not to provoke a crisis.³ Seton seems not to have quite realised that Calcutta had little wish to be friends with Ranjit, now or in the future, but rather wished to eliminate him.

On January 6 a certain Sham Singh was sent off by Ranjit with orders for the evacuation of Anbala.⁴ Metcalfe then replied to Ranjit's note of the 4th. He reminded him that Ambala only represented the first step towards compliance; objected to the military preparations in hand; and as to consultation about the Sutlej post, said that if only a formal notification was required, he would be willing to 'consult'

¹Government to Seton, 26th December, 1808, R. O. VI. 6; printed, P. G. R., No. 3.

²Seton to Government, 2nd January, 1809, R. O. III. 5.

³Seton to Government, 11th January, 1809, R. O. III. 6; printed, P. G. R., No. 6.

⁴Metcalfe, No. 58, 12th January, 1809.

the Raja in that sense when the requisitions had been fulfilled.¹ Ranjit's reply next day showed that this merely formal 'consultation' did not much please him. He asserted that the troops were assembling only to attend the Magha Fair, and asked for immediate discussion of a treaty of friendship.² This was "nothing but evasion", Metcalfe thought, and he repeated that he had no power to discuss a treaty while the requisitions remained unsatisfied.³ The ministers at the same time verbally "pressed much for the conclusion of a Treaty of amity and alliance." This desire, Metcalfe thought, was due to a fear that the British advance might be dangerous to Ranjit's prestige, if not his power. "I did not think it necessary to inform him, that I had orders against making any Treaty with him, without further instructions; such a declaration might have alarmed him, and I had sufficient ground of objection in the non-execution of his engagements." Invited to see Ranjit on the 8th, Metcalfe maintained that Saniwal and Faridkot came under the requisitions; Ranjit said that they were old conquests. On the 10th Ranjit left for Amritsar, and Metcalfe followed.

"During this period", Metcalfe noted, "the Raja's military preparations have been carried on with the utmost possible activity. They consist in assembling troops from all quarters, in collecting ammunition and military stores, and in hastening the completion of, storing, and mounting guns in, the new fort at this place." The army which had been destined to assisting Raja Sansar Chand against the Gurkhas had been recalled. Diwan Mokhum Chand was believed to be at Ludhiana Ghat on the Sutlej. Questioned on this, Ranjit said "that the Dewan was in the habit of acting for himself, considered himself, from his advanced age and the general control that he had over all affairs, a privileged character, and was very difficult to manage." This was an amusing parallel to the way in which Ranjit's ministers talked of his uncontrollable vagaries; what was more serious, Ranjit admitted "that the Dewan as well as others, was decidedly inimical to the British

¹Metcalfe, No. 58, 12th January, 1809, enclosure I.

²Ditto, enclosure II.

³Ditto, enclosure III.

Government, and was urging him to war." Metcalfe considered that the Diwan's being at Ludhiana was a hostile gesture; he was there either to invade British territory or to repel a British invasion. To prepare for the latter, when a British force was marching towards the frontier, was not an unnatural step; but Metcalfe chose to view it as evincing "a conviction of the probability of war, which implies an inclination towards it."

Hence he considered it undesirable to agree to any treaty. "He (Ranjit) makes every preparation for war, and demands a Treaty.....By such a Treaty as he desires, he would gain the established confirmation of his usurped dominion over the Chiefs of the Punjab, and a security in our good faith, against the possibility of danger to his power, from the connection of his enemies with the British Government, whilst the utmost advantage that we could gain and that not certainly, would be his amicable compliance with the arrangements immediately in contemplation and a respite from war for the moment, without however an adequate security in his good faith against future hostility; for we would be necessary (to) make every arrangement with reference to the expediency of constant precaution against the vigilance of his secret enmity." Metcalfe was, therefore, warning the Commander-in-Chief that war was probably inevitable. The letter had advised him, if it came to final crisis, to go on talking to the Sikhs for a few days more to give the army time. Such a delay, he replied, would be "perfectly, consistent with the state of affairs at this Court", but he would also bear in mind that too much of the cool campaigning weather must not be wasted.¹

On January 12, the Commander-in-Chief decided, on the strength of Metcalfe's letters, to order the Army of the Sutlej forward and Ochterlony took the road towards Patiala with three infantry battalions; a regiment of cavalry and some artillery. His forces were capable of being reinforced to any degree, as there were plenty of troops in the northern Doab.²

¹ Metcalfe, No. 58, 12th January, 1809.

² Seton to Captain R. Close, Acting Resident at the Court of Sindia, 16th January, 1809, R. O. IV. 73.

The financial arrangements for the "army of observation" are of some interest. They were made through a certain Harsukh Rai, a great banker of Delhi, who had played a gratifying part in the Maratha war and had accompanied Lord Lake into the Punjab. He often obliged the Residency in a financial way, his credit being "almost inexhaustible" and his "zeal and attachment" indubitable. He now came forward with two lacs of rupees and a guarantee of another, for the pay of the troops, thus obviating any trouble such as had been experienced in the 1805 campaign — when, however, money was scarcer and Government credit lower. He was sent to Karnal with the military chest, and Seton was anxious that he should join Ochterlony and gave him the benefit of his intimate knowledge of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs. He was being allowed $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent on exchange. Most of his dealings with the Treasury had been without profit to him; his motives were pride and "public zeal."¹ *All zeal Mr. Easy.* Seton was also asked to procure Rewari camels to transport 1,000 maunds of grain for the force,² and endeavoured to do so through a friendly Raja.³ Having received his instructions from Government, Seton wrote to Sahib Singh "reminding him of the relation in which he stood with respect to the British Government." The latter informed Sahib Singh that the main aim of the march was to protect him and his fellow-sardars, and expressed the belief that he would, therefore, feel a "zealous and unalterable" eagerness to assist it.⁴ Seton wished to have as many as possible of the chiefs accompany the march, and when Bhag Singh consulted him as to what he should do, he urged that chief, in very cordial terms, to join Ochterlony's camp; which advice was followed.⁵

Jwala Nath, a man late in the service of Oude, brought to the Commander-in-Chief letters from five Sikh chiefs, including the Rani

¹ Seton to Carey, 10th January, 1809, R. O. IV. 66; Seton to Government, 31st December, 1808 and 2nd January, 1809, R. O. III. 4. and 5.

² Head quarters Karnal, to Seton, 16th December, 1808, R. O. II. 97.

³ Seton to Carey, 10th January, 1809.

⁴ Seton to Government, 15th January, 1809, enclosure II. R. O. III. 9; and Seton to Carey, 15th January, 1809, R. O. IV. 70.

⁵ Seton to Government, 15th January, 1809, enclosure

Sada Kaur, and provided information as to their dispositions and Ranjit's strength. He reported these chiefs as anxiously desirous of British protection. Fateh Singh had told him that the British could count on him if their troops penetrated the Jullundur Doab.¹ Seton recommended that friendly assurances should be returned. "To Bhagwan Singh of Booreea", he wrote, "the vicinity of the British detachment...must be a source of peculiar tranquillity—as I am in possession of many letters from him, which evince the utmost terror of Ranjit Singh,—with whom nothing but the dread of seeing his country overrun, could have induced him to keep up the smallest intercourse." The Patiala *akhbars* revealed Ranjit Singh's alarm at the British approach. The Chiefs ought to be very well disposed. "It appears nevertheless", Seton went on, "that Ranjit Singh is intriguing with all the Sikh chiefs, and, by insidious messages, endeavouring to inspire them with a fear of the British Government, and to instil into them a confidence in himself. From the greater part of these chiefs I continue to receive most unequivocal assurances of attachment; more especially from Bhye Laul Singh, who is now with Ranjit Singh. Raja Bhag Singh, although one of the first who originally claimed our protection, may nevertheless feel himself embarrassed how to act, from his being the uncle of Ranjit. He is a good man, but without ability, and is generally led by Bhye Laul Singh. He has left Patiala and is on his way to Karnal. I think it likely that he may be bearer of some proposals from Ranjit Singh, who, from his having the character of standing well with the British Government", may perhaps be using him as a go-between.²

Affairs were complicated by the slow and sometimes devious ways in which news had to circulate among Metcalfe, Ochterlony, Seton, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Governor-General. Seton heard on the 17th from his news-writers at Patiala that Ranjit's troops had evacuated Ambala on the 12th³, doing much damage to the countryside on their march, which, he rightly anticipated, would freshen up Sahib Singh's pro-

¹ Carey to Seton, 10th January, 1809, R. O. II. 103.

² Seton to Caray 14th January, 1809, R. O. IV. 67.

³Seton to Government, 17th January, 1809, R. O. III. 10.

British sentiments.¹ The news proved true. Ambala was evacuated before Ochterlony got near it, so that the initial occasion for a clash was removed. Rani Dya Kaur came out to thank him for her reinstatement, and Bhag Singh, and the Vakil of Bhai Lal at once restored to her the shares of her territory that Ranjit had bestowed on them to interest them in his 'New Order'.²

Bhag Singh, on joining Ochterlony, had long talks with him. He thought that Ranjit did not desire war, but might be hurried into it; his councillors, differing among themselves, "kept him in a fluctuating state." Bhag Singh was warned that even he could not be exempted from the requisition of lands lately seized by Ranjit, and acquiesced cheerfully, with the remark that he personally stood to lose little. Jodh Singh of Chichrauli was discussed. He was, according to Bhag Singh, on the right side of the fence, but being under obligations to Ranjit did not like to set the example of deserting him; he would delay calling on Ochterlony till the latter reached Patiala, but would join Britain in case of war. The Colonel asked for a promise in writing to this effect.³ As a matter of fact, the chiefs were probably sitting on the fence. The interests of many of them were inextricably confused. They wished at any rate to wait and see whether the British advance was a serious move. Ochterlony felt it very necessary for him to know whether *older* conquests were to be included in the requisitions. Bhai Lal, he observed, was at that very moment with Ranjit, trying to obtain similar favours "from the man against whom he was amongst the most solicitous to obtain our protection".⁴ An agent of Ranjit, Bhai Gurbakhsh, arrived at Patiala to summon to his master Chain Singh (Diwan of Patiala), Jaswant Singh, and Bhag Singh;

¹Seton to Carey, 17th January, 1809, R. O. IV. 72.

²Ochterlony to Government, 4th February, 1809, R. O. X. 3; printed., P.G.R., No 19.

³Ochterlony to Government, 20th January, 1809, R. O. X. 4; printed, P.G.R., No. 14; Seton to Government, 25th January, 1809, R. O. III. 16; Government to Ochterlony (approval) 13th February, 1809, R. O. VI 9; printed, P. G. R., No. 23.

⁴Ochterlony to Government, 18th January, 1809, R. O. X. printed, P. G. R., No. 11.

he was annoyed to discover the whereabouts of Bhag Singh.¹ A report was heard from Holkar's camp that the Rajas of Jodhpur and Bikaner having come to terms, the former was anxious to get rid of his expensive Pathan mercenaries, and that Ranjit was 'in the market' for them.²

VII. THE CRISIS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS.

At Amritsar, Ranjit was pressing for a treaty, Metcalfe for restitution of stolen goods. Ranjit stood firm on Faridkot, arguing that it was a dependency of Kot Kapura, and so should be considered as having been his ever since he took the latter place. Metcalfe considered this "altogether false"; both places belonged to Patiala, and Faridkot, then "held by independent zemindars", had stood one siege and only fell when Ranjit crossed the Sutlej with his whole army in the previous October. As Ranjit agreed to everything else, Metcalfe said he would refer it to his Government: it was a trivial place away in the desert, and no doubt Government would refuse to leave it with Ranjit: it could be used to raise the question of Kot Kupura and the *old* conquests, if so desired, though Ranjit would never agree to surrender these. In the meantime, "the reference forms a good reason for not entering into any negotiation for a treaty, for which, if the present discussions terminate amicably, he will be constantly pressing."³ Ranjit was not pleased with the envoy's attitude over Faridkot, which does, indeed, seem somewhat harsh considering that it was only a trivial place in the desert, and how much prestige Ranjit had already been called on to sacrifice. He used the reasonable argument that he had to consider public feeling. He would join his army, so as to be able to submit the question to the decision of "the Chiefs of the Sikh nation," and hoped Metcalfe would accompany him. "It is proper that the Government should not be subject to the reproaches of the chiefs."⁴ Painly, he was afraid for the security of his internal position, and wished to make the chiefs share in the disgrace of yielding.

¹Seton to Government, 19th January, 1809, R. O. III. 12; printed, P. G. R., No. 13.

²Seton to Carey, 25th January, 1809, R. O. IV. 77.

³Metcalfe, No. 60, 18th January, 1809.

⁴Ditto, enclosure I.

But a fatal loss of prestige was precisely what the British Government desired to inflict on him. Metcalfe informed him that if he left to join the army, the Mission would consider it an act of war and leave his Court at once. "A treaty of friendship which is to last for ages is not the work of an hour or a day; and if the Maharaja means to enforce the instant execution of a treaty by putting himself at the head of his Army I cannot see how it is to be accomplished at all."¹ Ranjit replied in a Note of the same date—the 14th. Why should a treaty be delayed until after the settlement of Faridkot? "Not having power to do this trifle, notwithstanding its fairness, without instructions from your employer, is very inconsistent with full powers to negotiate all matters, and with the nature of the representative character." Great alarm had been spread by the British military preparations, and he could not allay this unless he could show his people a treaty of friendship. Hitherto he had made concessions without consulting his chiefs. Now he could go no farther. "You are the Aristotle of the age; be pleased to say if a treaty is delayed, and the establishment of the military post takes place, how can I be at ease."² Metcalfe repeated that a treaty which would "last firm for ever" could not be made in a day; on the other hand, "Where two states are in friendship no treaty is necessary merely to establish friendship.....I hereby declare, although no declaration is necessary...that there is nothing whatever unfriendly in contemplation from the establishment of a military post on that side of the Sutlej... and that there is no intention whatever of advancing beyond that river, or of making conquests on this side."³

The last part of this sentence was more or less true; the first was not; neither in the existing circumstances, could be easy for Ranjit to swallow.

Metcalfe considered that if Ranjit left to join his army, it would be either to attack, or to defend himself against Ochterlony, and in

¹Metcalfe, No. 60, 18th January 1809, enclosure II.

²Ditto, enclosure III.

³Ditto, enclosure IV.

case he would do his utmost to hamper the British movement hence open war would in that case be the best thing. If the Sutlej had been in flood, Ranjit might not venture to cross it for fear of being cut off, but it was now shallow and easily fordable. He therefore advised the Commander-in-Chief to regard a Sikh crossing of the river as declaration of war.¹

Ranjit replied on the 17th that he was entitled to some return for the concessions he had already made. "The oyster returns a pearl when it receives a drop of rain." He added defiantly: "This Government is indebted only to the Almighty for the favour which is bestowed on it, and for the future also; and to the divine favour I look at all times."² This struck Metcalfe as "an indecent anticipation of a successful issue to a war." He saw nothing in the evacuation of Ambala to argue peaceful intentions. "His preparations were not sufficiently advanced to enable him to reinforce the troops at Ambala, without staking his whole fortune on the defence of that place of strength. "As to Ranjit's contention that many of his soldiers were still scattered in their homes, "it is notorious that though many still remain, he issues repeated orders urging them to join him both by promises and menaces." A treaty was not in the least needed to reassure public opinion; only the Raja himself cared about it at all. It was even more ridiculous for him to say that he must go to his chiefs who were with the army because he could not trouble them to come to him. "I have known him long enough to know pretty accurately how much he cares for giving trouble to his Chiefs."³

Metcalfe, in short, saw no purpose in "further useless and endless controversy." He replied briefly that he had discussed all these points before, and was astonished to find the Raja still asserting that he had carried out the requisitions.⁴ Ranjit then tried to make

¹Ditto enclosure II.

²Metcalfe, No. 62, 21st January, 1809, enclosure I.

³Metcalfe, No. 62, 21st January 1809.

⁴Ditto, enclosure II.

his evacuation of Khur conditional on the granting of a treaty.¹ On the next day, the 19th. Metcalfe sent for Prabhdial, alone. "Prabhdial has more sense and better manners than the other persons who are employed by the Raja to negotiate, and I always find it more agreeable to discuss points with him than with the others." (The fact that Prabhdial was serving two masters added to his agreeableness.) They talked frankly, Metcalfe hoping to convince the Raja through Prabhdial that he had nothing to fear from the Sutlej post, and nothing to hope from war; and that if the British had to fight they would continue until Ranjit was deprived of any power to harm them in the future.²

This manoeuvre failed to yield results. The next development was that Metcalfe's posts began to suffer interference. He suspected the fire-eating Diwan, or "undisciplined troops," along the road; by the 20th his suspicions had fixed themselves on the former, and he believed that Ranjit must have countenanced the irregularity.³ On the 22nd he wrote to the Raja that he meant to quit his Court immediately in protest.⁴ Ranjit wrote disavowing the Diwan's conduct, and talked in the munshi's presence of pulling the Diwan's ears and beard.⁵ This sounded well, but the thing had happened before, and Metcalfe doubted his sincerity,⁶ and repeated his intention of leaving.⁷ Ranjit asked him not to do so, but stood firm on the denial that he had any more concessions to make, and remarked with some bitterness, "What has been done on your part for satisfaction of this Government, I do not know."⁸ Metcalfe postponed his departure a little, but insisted that he must go, arguing that the Diwan's insubordination proved "that whatever the Maharaja's disposition may be the Dewan is the master

¹Ditto, enclosure III.

²As 2.

³Metcalfe, No. 63, 26th January, 1809.

⁴ Ditto, enclosure I.

⁵Ditto, enclosure II.

⁶Metcalfe, No. 63.

⁷Ditto, enclosure III.

⁸Ditto, enclosure IV.

Seton, replying on February the 1st, found the matter a very delicate one, but agreed that Metcalfe had not yet provided any sufficient reasons for war, though he might have some, as he had hitherto shown great coolness ; also that the absence of the British heavy siege guns prescribed caution.¹ Writing to Government to ask for a ruling, Seton ran over the various points raised by Metcalfe. On Faridkot, he admitted that the Envoy was correct in including it within the scope of the requisitions. The complaints against Mokhum Chand and the stoppage of posts seemed to him covered by Ranjit's apology. The Sikh troops lately in Ambala had probably by now recrossed the Sutlej in view of the British advance. It boiled down, therefore—since Faridkot was hardly important enough to justify war—to Ranjit's collection of troops on the left bank of the Sutlej, and his general military preparations. But Ochterlony's force could very well move up to the river without crossing ; another force under St. Leger was near enough to safeguard its communications. Ranjit was not likely to cross the frontier unless in desperation, from fearing that his enemies meant to do so. He appeared to be soliciting Amir Khan to march to his aid, but Amir Khan's situation rendered such help dubious. Any State might require explanations if its neighbour mobilised on its frontier. Ranjit and Metcalfe had exchanged such explanations, though it might be that the former's were less candid than the latter's.²

Metcalfe, not yet aware of the doubtful reception of his views, was repeating and expanding them. His theme was that the British should invade the Panjab, but take care to prevent any idea that they meant to annex it. How these two policies could be combined, is not at all obvious.

“There is every reason to believe”, he wrote, “that all those chiefs of the Punjab, who have lost territories, or have been otherwise injured, by his (Ranjit's) ascendancy ; and others also, who are disgusted by his unexampled domination over them, will be ready to resist his

¹Seton to Carey, 1st February, 1809, R. O. IV. 80.

²Seton to Government, 5th February, 1809, R. O. III. 22.

No doubt Ranjit would endeavour to spread the report that the British aimed at annexing the Panjab. This would do more than anything to unite his chiefs to him, and working upon religious and national feeling, "overcome for a time, the existing disgust at the domineering power of Ranjit Singh.

"It appears from the history of the Sikhs, that although distracted by internal dissensions, they have generally acted against a foreign enemy with the spirit of union . . . But the revolution effected by Ranjit Singh has tended to destroy the common fellow-feeling of the nation. His attempt at universal dominion over them, has created, in the midst of their own body, an enemy from whom they can only be relieved by the help of a foreign force." After leaving the Panjab,

Metcalf intended to keep in touch with chiefs who might prove useful. A declaration should be made to them that no conquest was intended, and that such chiefs as showed a friendly feeling would be left undisturbed in their territories.

Finally, Metcalfe urged that the Sikh army, "being composed chiefly of troops, who give military service in exchange for lands, was more likely to be dispersed by an invasion than troops of another kind." Invasion would alarm them for the safety of their own property, and make it harder for the Raja to carry them with him beyond the Sutlej.¹

There was, certainly, a good deal in these arguments. But Metcalfe could not have raised them had he not been satisfied that his Government's intention was to destroy Ranjit Singh.

The Commander-in-Chief, however, was agreeing with Seton that invasion of the Panjab would be unwarrantable, and congratulating himself that fresh orders from Government made the whole problem clear.²

Metcalf's distance from Calcutta exposed him to two awkward misconceptions of the feeling there. In November 1808 he was just convincing himself that no opposition would be offered to Ranjit, when the demands on Ranjit were being drawn up. Now while he was calling for war, Government was returning to a policy of peace.

VIII. OCHTERLONY'S ADVANCE AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FRENCH DANGER

News from Europe was the cause of this reversal. It has been surmised that an understanding reached between England and Turkey, was the decisive point; the documents refer rather to Napoleon's attack on Spain, which was rightly expected to lock up his armies indefinitely. This was the "important and gratifying intelligence" which Seton hastened to communicate to the King of Delhi, with his usual scrupulous

¹Metcalf, No. 64, 29th January, 1809.

²Seton to Carey, 5th February, 1809, R. O. II. 112.

attention to the feelings of that monarch ; whose own situation might indeed render him sympathetic with the suffering cause of Legitimacy broad. "His Majesty was pleased to express the utmost indignation at the treacherous conduct of Bonaparte towards the Spaniards, and his satisfaction at the success of efforts made by that brave people, for the recovery of its independence."¹

Fresh instructions were sent to Ochterlony on January 30. It was here laid down that no immediate danger from the French was to be anticipated. The function of a British advanced post now would have reference only to the holding in check of Ranjit : "and the reduction or subversion of the power of that Chieftain which under other circumstances was considered an event highly desirable and expected to be a probable consequence, though not settled purpose of the approximation of our troops to the frontier of the Punjab is no longer of the same importance to our interests." It would now indeed, be eligible to smooth British relations with Ranjit and to that end Government was willing to station its advance post a good deal further from his frontier, "if not to withdraw it to Karnal." Even if force should be necessary to repel him across the Sutlej, his removal from the (East) bank of the river could be treated as a basis for peace. It had been decided to extend Metcalfe's stay at Ranjit's court, instead of negotiating through the Colonel.²

On February 6, a further explanation was sent, dealing with Ochterlony's enquiry about Ranjit's older Cis-Sutlej conquests. Metcalfe had been told to refer these to Government:³ but in view of recent decisions, largely based on the news from Europe, it was not now intended to demand these old conquests at the risk of war. The only object was to

¹Seton to Government, 3rd February, 1809. R.O. III. 20 ; printed, P.G. R., No. 18.

²Government to Ochterlony, 30th January, 1809, R.O.VI. 7 ; printed, P. G. R., No. 17.

³Metcalfe had been told not to *promise* that Ranjit's old conquests would be tolerated, which meant leaving the Raja in an uncomfortable state of doubt. See extract from his instructions of 31st October, 1808, enclosed with Government to Ochterlony, 6th February 1809, R. O.VI.8.

exclude Ranjit's sovereignty from this side of the river. Government did not feel itself morally bound to go further than policy might dictate in affording protection to the Chiefs. In their mutual differences it had a *right* but not a *duty*, to intervene. Those who had obtained a share in Ranjit's former usurpations would be allowed to keep it, for if not, British protection might seem to them more of a burden than a privilege, and Government would be dragged into vexations complexities of old disputes.¹

Ochterlony's march through the Cis-Sutlej territories was continuing. At the beginning of the month he reached Patiala. He found the prince in a state of "childish joy" at being rescued from Ranjit. At Patiala Ochterlony interviewed, in Bhag Singh's presence, an agent of Ranjit, and tried by frankness to remove any impression of British hostility to Lahore.² (Government felt, on receiving his report that he had held out too much hope a treaty being granted to Lohore.")

When the column left Patiala, the Diwan Chain Singh accompanied it, "in command", says Ochterlony satirically, "of what is called a Thousand Horse." Ochterlony was well received at Nabha by Jaswant Singh, a chief who had received a good deal of land from Ranjit in previous years, and was afraid he was now going to lose it. It struck Ochterlony more forcibly than ever that an attempt to reverse *all* the acts of conquest that had taken place in this anarchical region would lose itself in a horrid tangle of claims, and that it would be politic to leave at any rate the leading men with their ill-gotten gains. The next point reached was Maler Kotla, where Ataullah Khan was at once reinstated in his whole possessions.⁴

¹Government to Ochterlony, 6th February, 1809.

²Ochterlony to Government, 4th February, 1809, R.O. X. 5, printed, P. G. R., No. 19.

³Government to Ochterlony, 27th February, 1809, R.O. VI. 11 ; printed, P.G. R., No. 27.

⁴Ochterlony to Government, 9th February, 1809, R. O. X. 6 ; printed P.G. R., No. 20.

Ochterlony's next halt proved an unlucky one for him ; it led to his resignation. He was met at Nathi by vakils from Ranjit, with a "long and tedious" recital of the Raja's complaints against Metcalfe for not making his Government's intentions clear, especially about the former conquests of Lahore. (This complaint sounds well-founded, as Metcalfe could not clarify intentions which he did not know himself.) Ochterlony took it on himself to argue the matter. Metcalfe, he said, could not refer the old conquests to his Government until the new ones were given up ; but the British Government could not be suspected of any greed for territory. The vakils appeared impressed, and begged him to halt until they could report. He agreed to do so until the night of the 16th, under the belief that his Government wished to avoid war.¹ His action was disapproved, and on learning this he resigned his command.²

By the 18th, however, he was encamped near Ludhiana. This was an old conquest of Ranjit, from the widow of a chief named Rai Alyas, and he had bestowed it on Bhag Singh. Bhag Singh, like the rest, was anxious to know whether such old conquests were now to be restored, and to make his position safer he was suggesting that he should hand over Ludhiana to the British and receive Hariana in exchange. Ochterlony

¹Ochterlony to Government, 14 February, 1809. R. O. X.7 ; printed, P.G.R., No. 24.

²Ochterlony defended himself by saying that he had yielded to requests, not threats, and that by so doing he had in fact averted war ; adding : " a consciousness of rectitude will not submit to the language of complaint." (Ochterlony to Government, 19th April 1809 R. O. X. 12 ; printed, P.G. R., 39). The Government's attitude, founded on Metcalfe's version, was that Ranjit had only sent messengers to hoodwink the public into thinking that the British were moving with his assent ; that by listening to them Ochterlony had implied a disparagement of Metcalfe ; and that it was necessary to censure him, "for the maintenance of subordination both in the civil and military department of the state." (Government to Ochterlony, 13th March, 1809, R.O. VI. 12 ; printed, P. G. R., No. 23, ; and Government to Ochterlony, 29th April, 1809, R.O. VI. 15 ; printed, P. G. R., No. 24). The Commander-in-Chief's interposition Ochterlony was in command, and assured that his error was felt to have been a perversion, of the spirit of public opinion, and not in the perversions, of the spirit of public opinion. 13th June, 1809, R. O. VI. 17.)

thought it might be as well to agree, and bring the Muslim Chiefs of Hariana to Ludhiana, where there were many Muslims : they "must be more devoted to us than we can ever expect a Sikh to prove."¹ Bhag Singh a little later formally requested that he might have Karnal, or Panipat, in exchange for Ludhiana. Without the fort of Ludhiana, he said, which would be occupied by the British, he would be unable to collect his income of Rs. 17, 800 per annum from the 41 villages of the district;² a plea which recalls the fact that taxation was in that period rather a military than a fiscal operation. Government decided that a little cash compensation for the merely temporary (as then intended) occupation of the fort was enough for Bhag Singh. As to the related question of restoring Ludhiana to the family of Rai Alyas, Government agreed with Seton that to do would be gratifying to the abstract sense of justice, but that this sense could not be indulged at the expense of public interests "To pursue the dictates of abstract justice and benevolence by the indiscriminate redress of injuries, beyond the limits of our admitted authority and control, would be to adopt a system of conduct of which the political inconvenience and embarrassment would not be compensated by the credit which might attend it)³—Strictly speaking the British Government surely was bound to afford redress of injustice committed in an area of which it considered itself overlord from the moment when it obtained control of Delhi.

At the moment, however, the problem that was exercising the "men on the spot" was how to adapt their military measures to the changed instructions from Government arising out of the news from Europe.

On February 10, the Commander-in-Chief wrote to Seton to ask his opinion. He himself thought that if Ranjit gave up Khur and Faridkot and retired across the Sutlej, the British advance posts might be withdrawn or reduced, so as to soothe his nervousness. If Ranjit did not

¹Ochterlony to Government, 18th February, 1809, R. O. X. 8 ; printed P. G. R., No. 25.

²Seton to Government, 3rd March, 1809, R. O. III. 31.

³Ochterlony to Government, 4th May, 1809, R. O. X. 13.

part of the British Government.”¹

The Commander-in-Chief thought Ambala too retired a post to serve as a protection to the chiefs. It would be highly desirable, he wrote to induce Ranjit to give up all his Cis-Sutlej lands, and withdrawal of the Ludhiana post, over which he had always shown anxiety, might be offered as a *quid pro quo*.² The suggested bargain would have been a shrewd one on the British side—handsome territories in return for a certain number of soldiers being marched a certain number of miles Seton agreed. “So very desirable does the relinquishment of all the places of this description, held immediately by Ranjit Singh appear, that I should think it advisable to endeavour to obtain it, even without reference to such of those former usurpations as he may have bestowed upon his favourite Chiefs. To render complete and universal justice, in that quarter is perhaps though very desirable, impracticable. In an arrangement of such magnitude, and which embraces so many contending interests, something must perhaps, be sacrificed, some means of providing for the sufferers by this arrangement, if adopted, might hereafter be devised : and the chiefs in possession, seeing themselves protected by the British Government, would probably soon transfer to it, the allegiance which they may hitherto (have given) Ranjit Singh, and even supposing this to be doubtful, the number of their troops or armed followers is so limited, as to obviate any political risk from their disaffection.” Failing this, “a sort of compromise might perhaps be effected, by leaving Ranjit Singh in *possession* of the places in question, but under the express condition, that he is not to retain any forts or entertain any troops on our side of the Sutlej ; in a word that he is to be a mere zamindar, not a chief, and that his lands are to be held as estates and not on a tenure of a Sovereign or independent nature.”³

¹Seton to Carey, 12th February, 1809, R. O. IV. 81.

²Carey to Seton, 17th February, 1809 R. O. II. 120.

³Seton to Carey, 19th February, 1809, R. O. IV. 86.

Seton's letter being cordially approved by the Commander-in-Chief, who had moved up from Saharanpur to Karnal, he wrote again to amplify some details of his project. It was uncertain, he observed, how much Ranjit's Cis-Sutlej possessions were worth to him, and he might argue that without troops he would be unable to collect any revenue at all. In that case the British Government might offer to manage the lands and collect the rents, thus gaining an additional hold over him, though the straggling, disconnected nature of the estates might make the work awkward. Perhaps his *right* to own them, though not now denied, should not be formally admitted, in case the British Government should wish later to entertain the claims of ousted proprietors.¹

IX. RANJIT ON THE FENCE.

While these happy speculations were being indulged in at Delhi and Karnal, Metcalfe at Amritsar was pursuing the uneven tenor of his negotiations. At the critical point when Metcalfe was threatening to leave and calling for an invansion, Ranjit, to delay him, "introduced a new negotiator on the boards." This was no other than Bhai Lal Singh, who set to work zealously, representing himself as a devoted British adherent. It was on January 26, that he first called on Metcalfe, and begged him to sign a treaty. Next day he reappeared with Prabhdial and requested, instead of a treaty, a written guarantee not to intervene west of the Sutlej. This was also refused, as tantamount to a treaty.² On the 29th Ranjit sent for Metcalfe, and put a paper into his hands, declaring that he resigned himself to the envoy's advice, since the counsels of his chiefs were contradictory.³ Metcalfe replied that the only advice that he had to give was compliance with the requisitions⁴. On the 30th Ranjit presented a list of questions. Would any further requisitions be made? Would the British post, once established some-

¹Seton to Carey, 24th February, 1809, R. O. IV. 90.

²Metcalfe, No. 65, 3rd February. 1809.

³Ditto enclosure I.

⁴Ditto. enclosure II.

where by mutual agreement, be thereafter moved forward ? Would any "attack be made on the Jageerdars, Thanedars or friends of this Government established on the left bank of the Sutlej before your arrival or not ?" Would a treaty be granted as soon as the requisitions were met ?¹

Metcalf had by the now, it seems, made up his mind to treat anything Ranjit might say as unreasonable and insidious ; he only answered these questions because he knew Ranjit was now taking counsel with certain chiefs whom he trusted, and who had taken no part in earlier discussions; these men might think the British tone abrupt and uncivil if no answer were sent. "An inveterate suspicion has long prevailed in this country", he wrote to Government, "that the British Government entertains the design of conquering the Punjab" ; the British advance to the Sutlej had naturally stimulated this suspicion. Considering war inevitable, therefore, Metcalfe did not wish Ranjit to be able to make capital out of it with his chiefs.² His answers to the questions were evasive : he was surprised to find Ranjit raising difficulties after throwing himself on his advice—he knew of no further requisitions—the British would not cross the Sutlej—he could not say what would become of the Raja's Cis-Sutlej adherents—a treaty could be made whenever the sentiments of the two powers should coincide.....Ranjit immediately asked for a discussion of where the Sutlej post was to be stationed. Metcalfe said that he could not discuss it.³

On the last day of January Ranjit summoned him to what he promised should be a final settlement of differences. The conference began as usual with Ranjit commending himself for having fallen in with the wishes of the British, and enquiring when they were going to fall in with his : and Metcalfe arguing that the Raja had not kept his promises, but was still mobilising on the Sutlej and plundering

¹Ditto, enclosure III.

²Metcalf, 110-65, 3rd February 1909.

³Ditto, enclosure IV.

beyond it. Several hours of talk ensued, joined in by Fateh Singh, Jodh Singh of Wazirabad, and the regular councillors. The Raja gradually weakened, and ended by promising to stop moving troops towards the Sutlej, and to restore Khur and Faridkot at once. He then asked that the British post should not be on the Sutlej but further back, for instance at Sirhind. Metcalfe (who did not know where it was intended to be placed) said he could do no more than report the request,

On February the 1st news arrived of Ambala having been in fact restored to the Rani Dya Kaur, on the 2nd Ranjit professed that he had sent orders for Khur and Faridkot to be abandoned. The Diwan denied having stopped Metcalfe's posts.¹

But the Raja was determined to take precautions, as he well might in view of the envoy's ambiguous attitude. He was ordering cavalry up to the Sutlej to join the Diwan. Getting wind of this "duplicity and shameful falsehood", Metcalfe was about to send his munshi on the 4th to protest and declare his intention of leaving at once, when councillors came to propose that vakils of the Raja should be sent to Ochterlony's camp. Metcalfe grumbled, but changed his mind and told his munshi only to ask an explanation of the Raja's duplicity. The reply was that those troops had been previously despatched, and were now being recalled. Ranjit added a wish to be notified of Ochterlony's movements—"If the detachment marches also from Pateela, without intimation, my people will be much alarmed and disturbed." Next day they met, and "Ranjit Singh expressed great alarm and anxiety respecting the advance of the division under the command of Major General St. Leger." Metcalfe said this advance had only been due to the Raja's prevarications, and was temporary,

"His army on the Sutlej" Metcalfe wrote to his Government, in a style that seems much at variance with his attitude to Ranjit, "must

in the natural course of thing soon break up. It has been encamped for a long time on the same spot, and cannot probably find support there much longer. It has done great mischief to the country on both sides of the river. Although this circumstance does not immediately much affect Ranjit Singh, as the country belongs principally to other chiefs, yet he also suffers by his army being assembled there, in the loss of contributions, which he would be otherwise levying on several tributaries : and the army in general, and the individuals of it are put to expense and inconvenience by their present situation. There is, therefore, better ground, than the Raja's engagements, for a belief that the army will soon disperse.

"Indeed much against the Raja's inclination a considerable dispersion has taken place from another cause. The approach of the British Army has occasioned great alarm among the Raja's troops on the Sutlej. A very considerable diminution of the Deewan's army has in consequence occurred. Several of the chiefs have quitted it on various pretences, and many of the soldiers have deserted, without taking the trouble to assign any pretence." It would indeed be paying too great a compliment to the Raja's army on the Sutlej, to express much anxiety about it to him. Still, Metcalfe would try to obtain its withdrawal by playing in Ranjit's fear of the British strength.

On the 5th Ranjit again expressed a hope that Sirhind would be selected for the British post. Metcalfe again held out no encouragement. On the 6th, Suda Singh and Nizam-ud-din, the vakils chosen, left for Ochterlony's camp—where they had the interview already described. By sending them Ranjit was trying to persuade his people that he was taking a share in fixing the location of the British post. Metcalfe had no objection, from a belief that no one was likely to be deceived. "The whole country sees clearly, that after making every preparation and exertion, with a view to a contest, after great parade and much blustering he has neither the power nor the spirit to resist the British army. This opinion will perhaps operate as strongly as a signal defeat, with reference to the future estimation of his power and character."

"Under actual circumstances, it appears to me to be advisable to allow matters to terminate amicably, without immediately relinquishing the advantages which are derived from the advanced position of our army on the East of the Sutlej..." He was writing in the same tenor to St. Leger and the Commander-in-Chief, and hoped that all would be settled within a few days.¹ It was only ten days since Metcalfe had been rashly calling for the invasion of the Panjab.

On the 14th. Metcalfe received instructions, dated the 23rd January, and learned that it was contemplated to withdraw Ochterlony from the Sutlej. He argued that this should not be done. In the past few days things had been going well at Amritsar, and Ranjit had been in a pacific frame of mind. The requisitions were likely to be satisfied very soon, so that there was no need to make a concession to the Raja's feelings. Besides, to leave the Sutlej might savour of weakness, until the Raja's submission had become public knowledge. "Amongst the states of India, and with people in this country who may not be acquainted with the turn of the late discussions it would appear that the British army had advanced for the purpose of conquering the Punjab and had retreated in consequence of the formidable array of the Raja's army on the Sutlej." Ranjit's ambitions, moreover, might get the better of him if he heard that the British were in retreat. Hence Metcalfe would suspend the communication to Ranjit of the Government's intentions, hoping that if the object could be gained without this concession, it would be cancelled. He would also be presumptuous enough to obtrude some local considerations on the attention of the Right Honourable the Governor-General in Council, who he trusted, would believe him "actuated by an honest zeal for the public good."

"I understand", he wrote, "His Lordship's object to be to confine Ranjit.Singh's dominion within the Sutlej, but to maintain with him the relations of amity and to avoid all causes of hostility: to secure the protection of the chief of the country between the Sutlej and the Jumna,

¹Metcalfe, No. 66 6th February, 1809,

and to avoid all interference, connection, or control beyond the former river. I shall submit my remarks to you with reference entirely to these views."

To confine Ranjit to his proper bank of Sutlej, without a British force on or near the river, would be difficult. Time must elapse before that region could shake off its impression of Ranjit's sovereignty. He would continue to enforce tribute by plundering raids which our troops, if far off, would not be able to stop, and which would in the end lead to war. "With the exception of the Raja of Pateela, the Chiefs on the Jumna, those to the South-east of Pateela, and perhaps Umbala, the Chiefs of the country between the Sutlej and the Jumna would be more under the influence of Ranjit Singh, than of the British Government, because they couch to violence, more than they respect moderation." The Raja would be too prudent to persist further in aggression? — "From the result of much observation of Ranjit Singh's character, I venture to say that he is extremely short-sighted; that he is actuated by momentary impulses, and does not reflect much upon consequences...he resisted the demands of the British Government, and made every preparation for war, until the near approach of danger made him shak...this ambitious chief...will become, I venture to say more trouble-some by every concession which he may receive from the British Government." A British withdrawal would kindle once more his dream of obtaining "that fair country" beyond the Sutlej; it would "not fail to be attended with the utmost surprize throughout the country...Ranjit Singh and his partizans would clap their wings; those who want the protection of the British Government would lose confidence: and the reputation of the British Government would suffer."

The power of Ranjit, continued Metcalfe, warming to his congenial theme, rested on opinion. Hitherto he had had to deal with petty princes. "The successful issue of his dispute with a great state, would raise his name higher than if ever was, and in proportion increase his strength." And in the end British troops might have to retrace their steps to the Sutlej, to deal either with Ranjit or with "the possible revival of the French designs against India." Then all the present difficulties would

recur : while at this moment they were in a way to be overcome, Ranjit being cowed and unable to collect enough troops to resist. "It is a fact, that with every possible exertion, he has not been able to collect an army, now, nearly equal to that which he had with him at Kasur, and on his last expedition.

"If the Raja should commence hostilities with the British Government, it will probably be when he perceives that Government is embarrassed in another quarter. In such a case, the presence of the detachment on the Sutlej will be a check rather than an encouragement ; and in the event of war between the British Government and any states of India, a reinforcement of infantry to the present force would enable it probably to maintain the rights and interests of the British Government in this quarter secure : or even to overthrow the power of Ranjit Singh," The latter might, no doubt, attack the Company in spite of the presence of its troops on the Sutlej. But was this likely ? "He is not famous for desperate enterprizes, and there is ground to believe that he will not venture to make an attack on the British post.

"The Raja's army is so constituted, that he will not be able to keep together permanently, a force sufficient to be an object of distrust to the British Government." Still, the British Government, "in pursuing a course of policy, calculated to defeat the designs of our European enemies, has advanced a position with respect to Sikh affairs, from which it cannot at present recede with honour." If there must be withdrawal, let it be *after* the country has become familiar with the idea of British superiority. "The British Government appears at present in a glorious character in this country, as the Curber of the Tyrant, and the Protector of the weak, expelling usurpation and doing justice, most disinterestedly, to the injured, advancing, with the arm of might, to fix bounds to the progress of ambition and oppression. I contemplate with grief...the retreat of the British Government, the triumph of the usurper..."¹

¹Metcalfe, No. 68, 15th February, 1809.

This was the true language of one of Wellesley's young men, with a good deal of Metcalfe's private animus against Ranjit mixed into it. After lashing himself up into this glorious peroration, he resposed for two or three days, and then broke out with another long despatch on High Policy.

Writing on the 19th, he expressed gratitude for Government's general approval of his activities, while regretting that he had failed to grasp its intention of making no sort of a treaty. He was now free to confess that he had always longed to be able to tell Ranjit plainly that there was no treaty in store for him. He had thought it was intended to spin out negotiations for a treaty on the original basis. What he had done had been to make the requisitions the necessary preliminary to discussion of a treaty "on the basis of the accomplishment of the objects of both states, which always implied discussions, difficulty and delay." He had, moreover, warned the Sikhs fairly that he could not *promise* a treaty.

Ranjit, he proceeded, was now most avid for a treaty. "His desire is so great, that he has latterly begged as a favour for the conclusion of those very engagements, which he formerly refused to accede to, except on conditions of the most extravagant nature. His excessive solicitude on this point, proceeds from a suspicion, deeply rooted in his mind that if the British Government will not give him assurances of its friendship, in the way of a Treaty, it must entertain designs against his power; united with a firm confidence, that the British Government will never violate a Treaty." Some trifle in their early discussion had, it appeared, possessed Ranjit with the notion that the British regarded verbal promises as nothing, written engagements as sacred.

Metcalfe's own ideas on the subject had, he explained, altered. "The change, which the late glorious intelligence from Europe has occasioned in the policy of Government, very materially affects the question.

"The views of the British Government were lately directed to objects, with which the conclusion of any amicable engagements with

Ranjit Singh was incompatible." At that time an envoy could not from his local standpoint affect to criticise high policy. Now the British Government had "relinquished the intention of taking advantage of any favourable circumstances to aid the spirit of revolt in the Punjab, with a view to the extermination of the Raja's power, and has even declared that His Lordship is unwilling to extend the influence and control of the British Government beyond the limits of the Sutlej.

"With reference to this change of policy, and the conviction entertained by His Lordship in Council, that the projects of France against the British possessions in India, must, if not entirely abandoned, at least be so far suspended, as to render any extraordinary or immediate preparations to meet them unnecessary, it appears to me, that the state of affairs between the British Government and the Raja of Lahore, may be considered, as it concerns the two states respectively, without reference to the expectation of an invasion by a European Power; and the local considerations which were before comparatively trifling, become of considerable importance."

The British Government's aim being to remain at peace with Ranjit, anything that might deter him from joining in a war in which Britain might be engaged with another state, and therefore anything that might allay his jealousy of Britain, must be welcomed. And nothing could do so much to help in this as a treaty. He withdrew nothing of his opinion of Ranjit's bad faith. But since the Raja was pressing so anxiously for a treaty, he must certainly attach some value to it. If his suspicions could be set at rest, there was nothing to make him more unfriendly to Britain than most of the other Indian states. If a treaty were withheld, he would perpetually be suspicious of Britain's motives. "This jealousy will always rankle in his heart, and will make him a most vigilant enemy."

To grant any sort of concession, in place of a treaty, would, Metcalfe repeated, be held a mark of weakness. "It may seem incredible, on a comparative view of the armies and resources of the British Government and the Raja of Lahore, that any concession, on

the part of the former, can be supposed to proceed from any concern for the possible hostility of the latter ; but I can assure you, that it is my firm belief, that in this Country, where the power of Ranjit Singh has, for a long time, excited so much dread, and where a very partial knowledge exists of the nature and extent of the British power, a receding step, without any evident cause, could be misunderstood in that manner by the generality, particularly as an idea less universal prevalence, that an hostile inclination exists between the two states." (This seems at variance with Metcalfe's earlier assurance that Ranjit's prestige had suffered disastrously.) On the other hand, to agree to a treaty, after all friction had been removed, could not be misconstrued. "That would be evidently the act of a great state, removing the apprehensions of an inferior " It would also obviate the danger touched on by the Governor-General, that Ranjit might keep his forces stationed in a position from whence they could threaten British territory. Ranjit was not likely to be able to keep his main army together permanently in any such position; but having or not having treaty would determine whether he would keep any force on the Sutlej. Such a force would be entrusted to Fateh Singh, "whose possessions lie principally between the Buja and the Sutlej; and who is both friendly towards the British Government and an advocate of peace. The rest of the Raja's army will be employed, wherever it may be required, and he will generally have employment for it.....

"The conclusion engagement with Ranjit Singh , appears to be objectionable. on the ground that it will give the seeming sanction of the British Government to his usurpation over the chiefs of the Punjab, and tend to strengthen a chief, the increase of whose power can never be desirable to the British Government. Under the former system of policy, when Government entertained the design of eventually encouraging the efforts of disaffected chiefs against the Raja, with a view to the extermination of his power, the objection was insuperable; but under the present plan, the weight of the objection may be supposed to depend on the question, how far the power of Ranjit Singh will be increased by the conclusion of amicable engagements on the part of the British Government, and how far it will be checked by the want of them."

Would the chiefs be stimulated to revolt merely by the absence of a treaty, or would they go on sinking into subservience ? Under present policy, the British Government would in any case not listen to applications from them. If countenanced in a measure, they might *gradually* try to assert their autonomy. "It is doubtful, whether even then, they would ever boldly set his power at defiance, except in the confidence of certain and immediate protection of the British Government."

Conversely, would a treaty embolden Ranjit to treat his chiefs with even more of arbitrariness ? It so, this must imply that refusal of a treaty would leave him always suspicious of Britain; and it became a question of balancing advantages. "It is indeed, after all, doubtful, whether his suspicions would induce him to conciliate all his chiefs by kindness, or to take measures to crush the suspected separately, and it is possible, that his confidence that they will not be assisted by the British Government may be a benefit to them instead an injury."

Another objection might be, that a treaty would tie the Company's hands in the event of a new French threat. This threat did not seem to be close, since Government was now willing to abandon measures that had been judged desirable for forestalling an invasion. And, Metcalfe ventured to suggest, "If the designs of France should be renewed, the British Government will not be prevented by engagements of simple amity, from using its right to call upon Ranjit Singh, for such security for his friendly intentions, as the circumstances of the time may require, and in the event of his refusing to accede or clogging by jealous conditions his assent, to such arrangements as may guarantee to him the security of his possessions, and at same time render the British Government to a sufficient degree independent of his eventual treachery, the British Government will have the right to take precautions against the hostility of his disposition and revert to the line of policy which may be most conformable to the actual state of affairs." Acting on the basis of a treaty, that is, the British would be able to test Ranjit's loyalty in an emergency, and act accordingly.

Ranjit would accept the original treaty-proposals, but these were now felt by the British Government to involve it in remote obligations, "neither requisite nor expedient." Mescalfe would therefore suggest a formal declaration of good will to Ranjit, with a promise not to interfere in the Punjab so long as he remained friendly and respected the British tutelage of the cis-Sutlej chiefs. What, then, of his former conquests beyond the Sutlej? The line "best suited to the character of Runjeet Singh, and the state of the public mind in this country," would be to persist in all demands made so far, but to raise no fresh ones. For the obstacle to convincing Ranjit of British friendliness "proceeds from a suspicion, which I know not how, has become deeply rooted in his mind, that the British Government advances its power by degrees, and establishes its dominion over countries by successive strides he would consider the demand for the restitution of his former conquests, as a confirmation of that silly idea, and would, I conceive certainly resist it, not so much perhaps on account of the actual value of these possessions, as from a belief that the British Government would not stop even there; and that honour and prudence would require, that he should make a stand whilst some degree of force might remain in his hand."

Metcalf concluded by saying that his presence in the Punjab was no longer necessary; but if circumstances detained him long enough to receive a reply and instructions from Calcutta, he would then be able to explain to Ranjit a British withdrawal from the Sutlej, or convey to him a British declaration of amity, as the case might be.¹

X. BRITISH POLICY TAKES SHAPE.

In the Doab the British representatives were engaged with circumstances of a more local character. The closer contact with the chiefs, produced by the army movements, was raising doubts of the policy of *laissez faire* intended to be applied to all but Ranjit. The activities of Jodh Singh Kalsia, in particular, were striking the Commander-in-Chief "in a very dubious and suspicious light." An Amritsar *akhbar* gave

¹Metcalf, No. 69, 19th February, 1809.

further information about him, and if it was correct, the Commander-in-Chief felt that Jodh Singh ought to be made an example of to the other chiefs; especially because there were other circumstances of "a disorderly and licentious conduct" which forcibly illustrated "the habits of depravity and lawless conduct, which mark the character of the Sikh chiefs, and their followers." A large number of camels had been stolen from St. Leger's force. The least that could be done was to make each chief responsible for outrages that took place in his own area.¹

Seton also discussed Jodh Singh and his "seeming intention. . . to join Ranjit Singh, with a large party of cavalry for the purpose of invading the Doab, the moment that chief should give him encouragement, by approaching in force."² Seton heard that Jodh Singh had two agents at Amritsar, and enquired from Metcalfe about them.³ He sent a protest to Bhanga Singh of Thanesar, about the camel theft, which had taken place in his area.⁴ About the end of the month Jodh Singh, it was learned by Ochterlony, crossed the Sutlej with his family to join Ranjit Singh.⁵

In general, the Commander-in-Chief found that Ranjit's lands and influence beyond the Sutlej were still for more considerable than he had supposed, and likely to be productive of future mischief.⁶ Seton agreed in regretting the fact, but saw no possibility of inducing Ranjit to surrender them.⁷

The question of how far forward or back to keep the British troops also continued to be agitated. Seton was much impressed by Matcalfe's 68th despatch, as showing "deep penetration much reflection, sound judgment, and ardent zeal." He agreed that to give up Ludhiana, now that Ranjit had been compelled to acquiesce in a British post on the Sutlej, was unnecessary, unless as a pawn in further bargaining; and that

¹Head Quarters to Seton, 18th February, 1809, R. O. II. 121.

²Seton to Head Quarters, 20th February, 1809, R. O. IV. 87.

³Seton to Metcalfe, 20th February, 1809, R. O. IV. 88.

⁴As 3,

⁵Seton to Government, 3rd March, 1809, R. O. III. 32; printed, P. G.R., No 30.

⁶Carey to Seton, 8th March, 1809, R.O. II. 129.

⁷Seton to Carey, 10th March, 1809, R. O. IV. 98.

it might revive Ranjit's ambition and plunge the cis-Sutlej country into anarchy.¹

On March 13 Government wrote to Ochterlony that Ludhiana would continue to be occupied, by the force under his command, so that he would be the channel of communication with Ranjit after Metcalfe's return.² The Commander-in-Chief was informed of the decision, and was discouraged from proceeding with the arrangement he had authorised Metcalfe to make with Ranjit—withdrawal from the Sutlej in return for abandonment, of Lahore's claims east of the river. Metcalfe had not acted on the suggestion. The Government, while recognising how desirable it was that Ranjit should be excluded from the Doab, felt that it could not raise, even as a bargain, the question of his former conquests. To do so, "might be injurious to our credit and might tend to confirm in the Ranjah's mind those sentiments of unfounded suspicion and that belief of our habits of gradual encroachment which he had so long and so firmly entertained and which it is so much our desire and our interest to eradicate." To be compelled to scrutinise all the claims that would be raised if Ranjit were removed from his old cis-Sutlej conquests would be vexatious. The Government, again, wished to avoid fixing a precise date for the withdrawal of its advanced post. A further consideration was that if the army withdrew from Ludhiana as part of a bargain with Ranjit, it could not decently return to the Sutlej at any future time while peace was maintained, and this would be an unwise fettering of its liberty of action.³

On the 25th of February an attack on Metcalfe's camp by a riotous crowd once more threw the relations between Lahore and the British into a state of crisis. The incident grew out of protests against the celebration of the Mohurram by Muslim sepoy in the escort. Metcalfe had taken measures to avert trouble, with the concurrence of Ranjit, who "blamed the intolerance of the Priests, and rejected their demands."

¹Seton to Carey, 26th February, 1809, R. O. IV. 91.

²Government to Ochterlony, 13th March, 1809, R. O. VI. 12.

³Ditto, enclosure II, Government to Commander-in-Chief, 13th March, 1809.

The trouble was serious enough, and Metcalfe thought that had the escort not marched out to counterattack, the camp would have been wiped out, for "the matchlocks of our assailants carried further and with surer aim than our musquets."

Metcalfe reported the affair without any undue heat. He learned that the chief Akalis had tried to restrain the trouble, and Phala Singh, that notorious firebrand, had been the chief ringleader. Ranjit had behaved well since the outbreak, and though Metcalfe thought that "his veneration of the Holy Temple would prevent his taking measures to punish the Akalis, he did not intend to press for punishment, as the fanatics had had their thrashing already."¹

Delhi and Military Headquarters, which had just been exchanging complacent anticipations of imminent success, were taken aback.² Metcalfe's report was followed by an ominous reply from him to an enquiry by Seton whether Elphinstone, en route for Kabul, could be communicated with *via* Lahore.³ Metcalfe said this would not be safe; a man who collected news for him had been jailed, though he had not protested, "considering him to be entirely a secret agent,"⁴ The Commander-in-Chief heard from Metcalfe that he was still in danger from the fanatics, and it appeared that Ranjit would secretly not regret a fresh attack. Seton learned this with "a sensation of the most painful anxiety", and suggested that the Commander-in-Chief might give Ranjit a very plain hint that he would be held responsible for the safety of the Mission.⁵ "In suggesting the adoption of so decisive a step", Seton explained to Government, "I was in some measure influenced by the reflection that the Sikhs are a wild, ferocious people ignorant of the ties of nations... and that it might be necessary to warn Ranjit Singh himself against a

¹Metcalfe, No 70., 26th February, 1809.

²Carey to Seton, 23rd February, 1809, R. O. II. 125.

³Seton to Metcalfe, 21st February, 1809, R. O. IV. 89.

⁴Metcalfe to Seton, 1st March, 1809, R. O. II. 128.

⁵Seton to Carey, 7th March, 1809, R. O. IV. 94.

criminal remissness upon such an occasion, and to make him comprehend and feel, that to suffer the perpetration of atrocious outrage, was to become an accomplice in guilt.”¹

Two days later (on March 9), when no further news had been received from Metcalfe, Seton was afraid that the worst had happened, and asked whether St. Leger could not be ordered forward to the Sutlej, with an ultimatum. Ranjit, who could easily protect the Mission with his Muslim troops, had “deprived himself of all claims to further forbearance.” Dewan Mokhum Chand, notoriously anti-British, had figured in certain incidents seeming to show that the Sikhs wanted to see how far they could go in provocation with impunity. “That the Sikhs generally speaking”, Seton went on, “are averse from war with the British Government, I believe. But I really think the averseness proceeds from fear. At all events if in His Excellency’s (the Commander-in-Chief’s) opinion the occasion calls for high and firm language, which I decidedly think it does, no time could be more favourable for holding such language than the present, when we are at peace with all the native powers, when we have a strong and well appointed army on the Sikh frontiers, and when we have a mission at the court of the King of Caubul, for the purpose of improving our political relations with that prince; a circumstance which, by operating on the fears of the Sikhs, must naturally increase their reluctance to involve themselves in hostilities with the British Government.”²

A letter from Metcalfe to the Commander-in-Chief of the 3rd, and a despatch from him of the 7th, allayed this anxiety. The despatch, indeed, pointed out that the assault had been no mere riot, but a systematic attack by horse and foot within a mile of Ranjit’s tents, and it was “pretty certain that part of the Raja’s troops were engaged on the side of the assailants.” It might be felt by his superiors, Metcalfe added, that Ranjit had connived at the attack, “and I ought not to conceal that such is the prevalent idea at this place.” However, he himself

¹Seton to Government, 7th March, 1809, R. O. III. 33.

²Seton to Carey, 9th March 1809, R. O. IV. 97

doubted this, as the outbreak might well have placed Ranjit in a position of great difficulty, though no doubt he might have averted it by greater vigilance. Further attacks were threatened, the Akalis, who had flocked into Amritsar for the Holi, being egged on by the taunts of the townspeople "and by an habitual thirst for blood and plunder." But Ranjit had provided enough troops to get the Mission through the Holi safely. Fanaticism had soon given way to greed as the main motive; indeed, it was said that the first shots had been fired by Muslims.¹

This news forestalled an outbreak of war. Had the Mission been further annoyed, and protected by Ranjit, the Commander-in-Chief had made up his mind to cross the Sutlej and inflict severe chastisement. He felt that far too much patience had been shown with Ranjit and his councillors, and hence "the systematic insolence with which they have endeavoured to degrade us in the eyes of the Sikhs." He doubted whether even now the British advance ought to be halted, and thought that Metcalfe would be well advised to leave Lahore while the army was still close enough to extend some protection.²

During this alarm, away at Calcutta in happy ignorance of what was happening, Government was making up its mind to grant Ranjit a treaty. Metcalfe's despatches 68 and 69 of February 15th and 19th, were received on March 11 and 13; on the 12th March the decision had been taken, and much of No. 69 had been foreseen. Instructions were sent to Metcalfe and Ochterlony on the 13th.³ The latter's contain an interesting section—"As the concluding paragraph of your despatch of the 18th ultimo implies a supposition on your part that in the event of an open rupture with Rajah Ranjit Singh, and of the destruction of his power, it was the intention of the British Government to appropriate the territories of the Punjab, I am directed to signify to you that *this* design was never in the contemplation of Government, and that if war had taken place with the Rajah of Lahore, and had terminated in the

¹Metcalfe, No. 72, 7th March, 1809.

²Carey to Seton, 11th March, 1809, R. O. II. 132.

³Kaye, op. cit., 219.

subversion of his dominion, Government would have judged it consistent with the principles of a wise and liberal policy, to restore to the several chiefs of the Punjab the possessions and the rights of which they have been deprived by the systematic usurpation and ambition of Rajah Runjeet Singh.”¹

Metcalf was informed that Government gave him the credit “of having secured without compromise those objects which were necessary for the vindication of the honour and the promotion of the just and reasonable views of the British Government with respect to the state of Lahore.” His advice to the Commander-in-Chief in favour of moving Ochterlony forward had been sound ; also his advice to invade the Panjab, if war should have broken out. Ranjit had been actuated by a sense of his own misconduct, and superstitious fear of the prophecy that he was to be overthrown by the British ; the British advance had convinced him that he was in danger, and prestige had forced him to make a stand. But “that he was prepared to submit to all our demands, rather than incur the danger of an open rupture, has uniformly been the opinion of this Government and has now been sufficiently demonstrated.” Government had seen its way to withdrawing the post from Ludhiana. but such a concession had become unnecessary, and Metcalfe had done well not to notify Ranjit of it.

Circumstances had now weakened the objections to a treaty of amity with Ranjit. It appeared that only a written engagement would set his mind at ease. “At a time when the danger of a foreign invasion was believed to be approaching, our knowledge of the character and disposition of the Rajah rendered the diminution, if not the entire subversion of his power, an object of immediate interest to the British Government and the Governor-General in Council (was) therefore unwilling to incur engagements which might counteract the operation of causes tending even independently of any active measures on our part, to the reduction or overthrow of his dominion, and preclude us from

¹Government to Ochterlony, 13th March, 1809, R. O. VI. 12.

taking advantage of a contingency so favourable to our interest in the existing crisis of affairs.

"This exigency no longer exists, nor is it in present circumstances in the contemplation of Government, to countenance any efforts on the part of the Rajah's subjugated chiefs to regain the rights of which they have been deprived by his usurpation and injustice." While the French menace persisted, "no obligation of public faith would have precluded us from taking advantage of events, which might lead to the substitution of a friendly for a hostile power. That danger is now considered to be indefinitely remote if not permanently removed."

A treaty would damp the spirit of revolt in the Panjab; hence Ranjit's desire for one. It would also carry advantages to the British. If it allayed his uneasiness—and he seemed to repose faith in written engagements—it would release them from irksome vigilance on the frontier. If an invasion from the north-west ever did come, a treaty would oblige Ranjit to co-operate with them; his refusal to do would absolve them from any obligations. The Raja having been chastened, a treaty would be a magnanimous gift; and as the satisfaction of British demands had been made a prior condition to a treaty, his making it would give him some moral right to a treaty.

Metcalf was therefore sent two drafts, differing in only one point. Each had four articles—

(a) Perpetual friendship, and most-favoured-nation treatment for Lahore.

(b) The British Government to have no concern with the territories north of the Sutlej.

(c) Ranjit to keep only small troops for police duty north of Sutlej and to commit no aggression there.

(d) Metcalfe to ~~procure signature~~ signature.

The first draft added in the 2nd article : "The Rajah renounces all claim to sovereignty over the Sikh Chiefs to the southward of that river and all right of interference in their concerns." The instructions pointed out that it was not intended to make Ranjit cede his "ancient conquests", but that henceforth no Cis-Sutlej chief could hold lands as his vassal. Much of his land there he might have given away without obligation of service, or have allotted to chiefs already settled there, owning no lands in the Panjab, and so passing now under British protection. With regard to other land, this provision might be felt by him as a disguised demand for fresh cessions ; and if so, to avoid long wrangling the second draft should be adopted. No further stipulations on his part were to be entertained ; if he did not care to sign, he should be made to feel that the British Government would remain no less friendly, so long as his behaviour was satisfactory.¹

XI. RANJIT'S FINAL STAND

Six weeks were still to pass before a treaty was signed ; Ranjit was not yet quite such a changed man as Government was picturing. In February he had arrested one of the agents of Seton's "news-writer on northern subjects of a political nature."² Metcalfe "waited with impatient patience" for orders for restitution of Khur and Faridkot. As usual Ranjit blamed the Diwan for the delay ; on being pressed, he agreed to send Sham Singh, with agents from Metcalfe, to effect the restitution. Metcalfe promised that the British troops under St. Leger would then begin their withdrawal ; Ranjit's troops were to leave the Sutlej on the next day. He wanted the two forces to be withdrawn *before* the restitution, but Metcalfe did not trust him. Sham Singh did not hurry his departure ; his latest excuse was that "he was enjoying the festivities of the Hoollee with the Raja."³

¹Government to Ochterlony, 13th March, 1809, enclosure I, (Government to Metcalfe, 13th March, 1809), R. O. VI. 12.

²Seton to Metcalfe, 21st February, 1809, R. O. IV. 89.

³Metcalfe, No. 71, 4th March, 1809.

Khur was restored in March, but there was "extraordinary and offensive procrastination and deceit" over Faridkot. Sham Singh was supposed to have gone to the Diwan to arrange for its return, it being within the latter's jagir and garrisoned by him. The Diwan meanwhile came to see Ranjit,—summoned to receive a reprimand, the Raja said, but according to rumour, in fact to advise him *not* to return Faridkot. Metcalfe heard that the garrison was refusing to march out, and demanding its arrears of pay. He protested strongly to Ranjit, who shuffled and sent a messenger with orders sealed by the Dewan; as Metcalfe suspected this to be a piece of play-acting, he then sent the Chief Munshi. Ranjit probably meant to give up the place, but a secret council had been held since the Diwan's arrival, and Metcalfe decided to advise St. Leger to wait a little longer and then to attack Faridkot. This was advice that might bring about war after all. Metcalfe, however, remarked that summer was coming on and would hamper a Sikh offensive: the rains would make it impossible to ford the Sutlej; though he repeated of having trusted Ranjit so far as to delay putting pressure on him, and confessed that if war did come he would "deserve great blame for his credulity."

Ranjit was revelling in Shalimar², either sent on such, or, what is more probable, masking his indecision. On the 24th, Metcalfe announced his intention of leaving and demanded an escort. Ochterlony put his finger on Jodh Singh Kalsia as the chief of the escort³. Seton wrote to the Commander-in-Chief on April 7 recommending the use of force against Faridkot, as the season was approaching⁴. But the 25th after Faridkot was restored.⁵

The period of extreme tension — from 1841 to 1842 — was marked by a crop of rumours (already referred to) of intervention by Persia and other Indian states, especially in 1841.

¹Metcalfe, No. 75, 22nd March.

²Kaye, op.cit., 218.

³Ochterlony to Government, 12th April 1841, No. 36.

⁴Seton to C-in-C, 7th April 1841.

⁵Seton to Government, 12th April 1841.

The Army heard from an Amritsar informant that on February 2 a vakil from Sindia waited on Ranjit with a letter, advising him, "in a hyperbolical style", to attack the British and trust to assistance from the south from the now united Marathas.¹ A news-letter of the 3rd gave the vakil's name as Gurdial; a later one said that he had been dismissed from Sindia's service, and had been sent by Surji Rao Ghatkia. Seton was inclined to believe the latter version, since Sindia was known to be very hard up, and was at present busy trying to realise his financial demands on the Raja of Jaipur.² Seton wrote to Metcalfe³ who replied on the 22nd—he was then hopeful of a settlement—that it was unlikely Sindia cherished any such schemes, or would lend his help gratis to Ranjit or would have employed a man like Gurdial on such business.⁴ Close, the Resident with Sindia, reported that Gurdial was a punjabi, now an adventurer at large but desirous of re-entering Sindia's service; he had probably exceeded his commission in order to puff his own importance. No doubt Ranjit would like it to be thought that he had allies on whom he could count; he had an agent residing with Holker; but no hostile plans could be learned of.⁵

Nonetheless, the Commander-in-Chief and the Government were agreed on the desirability of occupying Hansi, as a barrier between north and south India; too remote to serve as a station for policing the Sikh districts, it would be useful to intercept Maratha aid from Ranjit.⁶ In March, during the Faridkot delays, Metcalfe took the rumours more seriously. "With respect to the hope of aid, from the Marhattas, he looks to Sindia principally, merely, I believe because he is at present the nearest, and he is I dare say, with that carelessness of consequences which characterizes him, attempting to intrigue with that Chief. If this were certain, and there were any prospect of his succeeding (in) exciting Sindia to a war

¹Carey to Seton, 12th February, 1809, R.O. II. 117.

²Seton to Government, 15th February, 1809, R. O. III. 24.

³Seton to Metcalfe, 13th February, 1809, R. O. IV. 83.

⁴Metcalfe to seton, 22nd February, 1809, R. O. II.123.

⁵R. Close to Seton, 21st February, 1809, R. O. II. 122.

⁶Carey to Seton, 10th March, 1809, R. O. II. 130.

with the British Government, defensive policy would I believe point out the necessity of attacking him (before) he could be joined."¹ Close made enquiries indirectly from Sindia, and was given the rather odd story that Gurdial was Sindia's cook, he had gone to the Punjab on a pilgrimage, had approached Ranjit on his own initiative, and had been dismissed by his employer.²

These rumours were not enough to upset the agreement now in sight. Not long after the two draft treaties reached Metcalfe, one of them was signed at Amritsar on April 25. It was the second draft, which omitted the promise by Ranjit to renounce all interference with the Cis-Sutlej chiefs. The Government decided to inform Ranjit, however, that in its view the treaty precluded him from levying tribute on Cis-Sutlej areas not in his possession before his late expedition.³ In June the ratification was forwarded to Ranjit through Ochterlony.⁴ Metcalfe had left Amritsar on May 2, after a series of convivial farewell meetings with the Raja, to receive the praises of his employers for his "zeal, ability, judgment, and exertions."⁵

XII AFTER THE TREATY

The treaty lasted, but it took time to become an accepted fact. The campaigning season of this same year brought a fresh crop, if not of swords, at any rate of alarming rumours, largely connected once more with the Marathas. At the end of November Lahore news spoke of letters from Begam Somroo and Holkar, and two envoys from Sindia and Amir Khan. Mokhum Chand, it was said, had interviewed the latter, and had spoken in the council in favour of a southern move towards Afghanistan, which all the southern chiefs would join. Ranjit referred to the move to Kabul, and told the envoy that Sindia should make the first move.

¹Metcalfe, No 75, 22nd March 1809.

²Seton to Government, 3rd April 1809. *P. O. III. 1809.*

³Government to Ochterlony, 18th June 1809. *P. O. VI. 1809.*

⁴Seton to Carey, 13th June, 1809. *P. O. III. 1809.*

⁵Kaye, *op. cit.*, 122—4.

meant business. Two newswriters of Ochterlony reported military preparations, and he thought that Ranjit would move if assured of Maratha support.¹ "The habits of the Rajah of Lahore make it particularly difficult to discover his real intentions", he remarked, and he judged it necessary to put Ludhiana in a posture of defence. "The doubts and suspicions which have lately been excited in my mind, first by the anxious endeavours to conceal the presence of a Maharatha vakeel at his Durbar and lastly by the public answers they have received seem to claim particular notice and to warrant precautionary measures which although attended by an immediate and unauthorised expenditure of the public money will I trust receive the approbation of His Excellency in Council."²

Seton took the idea of a hostile alliance between Ranjit and Sindia seriously. "There cannot be a doubt that were the confederacy actually carried into effect, it would be eagerly joined by (Amir Khan), whose influence on Holkar's camp might enable him to induce the troops of the latter to promote his views." "If the confidence expressed by the Sikhs with whom I have conversed, in their great skill as marksmen, and in the superiority, in distant firing, of matchlocks over muskets, be real and unaffected, their minds seem to be impressed with an idea that, in that species of warfare, they would not engage our troops under any disadvantage.....I trust I shall not be censured as officious if I venture to hazard an opinion that, in the event of future war with the Sikhs, a corps of riflemen might be found to be of indefinite utility."

Sindia's wakil was reported to have urged on Ranjit "that the English nation first entered into engagements, and when it had the contracting party completely in its power, deviated therefrom ; and that Sindiah was therefore ready to break with the English, that the country from Agra to Hurdwar belonged to Sindiah, and that on Ranjit's marching to Bahawal poor he might depend upon the co-operation of Sindiah as well as on

¹Ochterlony to Government, 5th December, 1809, R.O.X. 33 ; printed, P.G. R., No. 63.

²Ochterlony to Government, 6th December, 1809, R.O.X. 234 ; printed, P.G. R., No. 64.

but Ochterlony treated these as fabrications of his own Lahore news-writer, and threatened to discharge the man.¹ He thought Ranjit "more apprehensive of attack than desirous of attacking", but added: "He would not perhaps be unwilling to engage in any combination which held out a hope of freeing him from a neighbour who keeps him in perpetual alarm."²

1810 came and found all quiet between Delhi and the Sutlej, Ranjit was occupying himself elsewhere.³ In July the British Government "observed with satisfaction the apparent change in the mind of Rajah Runjeet Singh from suspicion and distrust to confidence."⁴ In October, when Ochterlony was censured for having listened to overtures from Rani Ram Kaur and other discontented elements in the Punjab, he was informed that "in point of fact, Government is not disposed to think that the Marhattas entertain the very unpromising project of engaging in hostilities with the British power nor that any plan of combination between them and Runjeet Singh (though it may possibly have been a subject of communication with the latter on the part of Ameer Khan's vakeel) has ever been seriously meditated." Even a definite alliance between Ranjit and Amir Khan would not necessarily produce a rupture; it had always been known that both would attack the British power at any favourable opportunity.⁵

This was probably the nearest approach to a coalition between the Sikhs and Marathas, the two, in some ways similar, phalanxes of militant Hinduism that rose as the Muslim power dropped, only to find a new power ready to forestall them both. It is interesting to speculate on what might have come of close contact between them.

Between British relations with Ranjit, and with the Cis-Sutlej chiefs, Ludhiana was the connecting link. Ludhiana protected the frontier, and

¹Ochterlony to Seton, private, 13th December, 1809, R. O. II. 158.

²Ochterlony to Government, 22nd December, 1809, R. O. II. 161.

³Seton to Government, 18th February, 1810, R. O. III. 72.

⁴Government to Ochterlony, 28th July, 1810, R. O. VI. 49.

⁵Government to Ochterlony, 19th October, 1810, R. O. VI. 60.

dominated the chieftains. Briefly, it appears that the decision to retain it was due to the former consideration, but important from the latter.

Ochterlony urged, among other reasons for keeping Ludhiana, that it would be "a perpetual memento" of the chiefs' obligations to their protector.¹ Government's reply showed that it was thinking of the Cis-Satlaj area only from a strategic point of view. It had, it remarked, protected the chiefs only incidentally to a movement designed to protect itself. It could, indeed, claim some return from them. Their interest was to be independent of Ranjit, and dependent on British power only so far as might be necessary for that object. But obligations must be mutual, "and the true point of policy was to balance those obligations." They must acquiesce in a free movement of British troops through their territories, even if for purposes in which they might not at once see their own interest. They were at present nervous, and should be reassured that no meddling with their particular or mutual affairs was intended. A declaration should, therefore, be issued to clarify these points and to promise permanent protection from Ranjit in return for no money tribute but only an understanding that they should "zealously co-operate with the British power if invaded. "Now that Ranjit had been given his lesson, Ludhiana was not necessary as a bulwark against him : the British name would suffice. "The credit of our power would indeed be diminished in a dangerous degree if we could ascribe to the petty state of Lahore the chimerical project of encountering it." "In a few words the protection which it is intended to afford to the southern chiefs is of a general nature and removed from the obligation of a minute guarantee, applicable to every case of difference and dispute in which these chiefs may be engaged."²

¹Ochterlony to Government, 6th May, 1809, R. O. X. 14 ; printed, P.G. R., No. 43.

²Government to Ochterlony, 16 April, 1809, and enclosure, Government to Commander-in-Chief, 3rd April, 1809, R. O. VI. 14. For the Proclamation, issued on 3rd May, 1809, see Aitchison, *op. cit.*, VI. 63. A good deal differently from the despatch to Ochterlony, the Proclamation states that fact of the British troops having moved at the wish of the chiefs, and solely to protect them, is "clearer than the sun and better proved than the existence of yesterday."

Orders for the evacuation of Ludhiana; as speedily as possible, were repeated on the 13th June.¹ On the 17th, however Metcalfe reopened the question in a striking despatch. His argument was that the principle of protection must imply the duty of supervision. Some of the chiefs were less bad than others, but none were good enough to let slip an opportunity for aggression. Formerly the weak could at least apply to Ranjit, and he might support them for his own ends. "In this manner I have known him perform even acts of justice." Aggression had sometimes been restrained by fear of him. It was, indeed to refusal of such protection by the British that had enabled Ranjit to establish his influence. As long as they continued to refuse it he would always have partisans and be able to meddle un-officially. Maler Kotla, for instance, was a Pathan enclave among the Sikhs, and there was "a natural enmity between the tribes"; if events were now left to take their own course "we should witness the destruction of the most staunch adherents that we have in the country." The chiefs, as well as their subjects, would welcome British maintenance of order, except for a few like Bhanga Singh, "a downright savage." They were accustomed to, and in need of, a Paramount. When they had been left to themselves for two years, between the expulsion of the Marathas and the advent of Ranjit, even husbands and wives had flown at each other. Besides all other advantages, Ludhiana was the natural point from which to exercise supervision over the chiefs,²

The Army was also pressing for retention of Ludhiana, and the Government gave in from weariness on "a subject which has already been placed in every light in which it is susceptible of being raised."³ It seems to have been overborne mainly by the argument that Ludhiana was necessary for frontier defence; as the chiefs, it merely acknowledged that so long as the post was held some general supervision would be

¹Government to Ochterlony, 13th June, 1809. R. O. VI. 16; printed, P. G. R., No. 57.

²Metcalfe. No. 93, 17th June, 1809, sub-enclosure in R. O. VI. 19.

³Government to Carey, 26th June, 1809, enclosure in R. O. VI. 18.

inevitable, and Ochterlony was empowered to exercise this.¹ The chiefs were reconciled to it by the fact that their fear of Ranjit had by no means subsided. In September Seton found them trembling over Ranjit's successes against the Ghurkas. "The power of Ranjit Singh (is) considered to be so much argumented, and his natural arrogance is so much increased by his success, that all the petty Sikh chiefs are filled with dread, and the common conversation of Putteealeh, Jeend, Khytul, and Jigadree, turns on nothing but the danger which Rajah Saheb Singh, Bhaug Sing, Bhye Laul Singh and Bhugwan Singh are now threatened with, in consequence of his additional means of oppressing them and accomplishing his own ambitious views."²

XIII. IMPRESSIONS OF THE PANJAB

Metcalf's despatches throw some interesting light on the structure of the Lahore State at this time. He could, he said, have collected more information had he not studiously avoided doing so, in order to allay Ranjit's suspicions. He writes, moreover, in a very hostile tone. Ranjit was building up an empire, by the usual methods of empire-builders. Metcalf must have been unconsciously prejudiced by the fact that the expanding empire *he* represented did not desire large, united states on its frontiers; it preferred neighbours like the Cis-Sutlej chiefs, not very polished perhaps, but any rate easily amenable to pressure.

He was impressed above all by Ranjit's domineering character, and he did not pause to consider whether, for the peoples he ruled, autocracy might not be preferable to feudalism.

"Having risen.....to a degree of power and elevation never heretofore possessed by any Chief of his Religion, he puts no bounds to his arrogance and assumption of superiority over his nation. He treats respectable chiefs, formerly of equal and superior rank... with himself, with indignity, he expects profound submission from all, and has

¹Government to Carey, 1st July, 1890, enclosure in R. O. VI. 19.

²Seton to Government, 23rd September, 1809, R. O. III. 58.

established over them seemingly an absolute sovereignty. They hate this new and hitherto unknown autocracy, but they fear himRanjit Singh does not feel contented with the dignity of Maharaja to which he could not have aspired a few years ago. Those who wish to court him salute him as Padshah and this Royal Title has obtained some degree of currency in his Army and dominions. Amongst the Sikhs he is also pleased with the denomination of Singh Sahib, which is intended to signify that he is the head of all the Sikhs, and this denomination is applied exclusively to him.....His orders in his Army are peremptory, and are universally and instantly obeyed; the greatest Surdar and the lowest soldier seem to pay the same deference to him. At the same time his manners are affable and familiar,"¹

The men who struck Metcalfe as 'hating' this autocracy were, of course, the feudal class lately rearing itself above the primitive Sikh democracy. To have established discipline among such men was no small achievement. As to Ranjit's titles, a marginal note on one despatch remarks that he used the term 'Sarkar-Khalsaji' of his government to convey that his power and Sikh power were identical²; a more likely explanation than that of Cunningham, who thinks it indicated a modesty on Ranjit's part, a subordination of himself to the Sikh nation.³ In any case, Ranjit was clearly harnessing the revolutionary energies still inherent in Sikhism.

Further acquaintance deepened Metcalfe's impressions. "Ranjit Singh", he wrote in October 1808, "has succeeded in establishing throughout the territories subject to him, a species of Government which never existed before amongst the Sikhs. He is absolute. Everywhere, when he means to introduce his authority he takes care to destroy the independence of the former chief. With this view he sometimes removes the petty chiefs whom he subdues from the lands which they have long

¹Metcalfe, No. 16, 15th September, 1808.

²Marginal note on Metcalfe, No. 30, enclosure II.

³Cunningham, "History of the Sikhs", 180.

held to new possessions, and puts some of his favourite servants in possession of the newly conquered country.

"It seems to be a peculiar part of his policy to destroy all distinctions, and to make the high and the low equally his servants. His power has increased rapidly of late, and is increasing. But he does not reign in the heart of his people.....The general disaffection which is known to prevail in his army, exhibits symptoms of danger to his power whenever a favourable opportunity should present itself for casting off his tyranny, but at present his superior energy keeps all in subordination...

"His mind is much elated with his uninterrupted success. The first object of his ambition is complete sovereignty over the Sikhs, but it is impossible to speak with certainty of the other dreams that float in his imagination. It is not however too much to say that he will never be at rest."¹

Again, the disaffection of which Metcalfe speaks must have been feudal in essence. The army was still largely made up of the levies brought by vassals. But the rank and file of the Sikh soldiery were men with an ideology of their own, men who bore some resemblance to the troopers of Cromwell's New Army; even, perhaps, where their leaders had carried them furthest towards banditry, as in the Cis-Sutlej area. Even the Ironsides became bandits when they were taken to Ireland by officers with an eye to their own pockets. And if Ranjit set himself to "destroy all distinctions", he was following in the footsteps of those monarchs who, in alliance with their peoples, broke the power of feudalism under the shadow of an absolute Throne before which all men must bow. Democracy has perhaps seldom in the East risen above this level, and seldom fallen so low as at times in Europe.

Metcalfe was anxious to convince himself that Ranjit would be hamstrung, if he went to war with the British, by internal revolt. No doubt he was correct in saying that the chiefs would desert. Fateh Singh

¹Metcalfe, No. 25 1st October, 1808.

Ahluwalia, for instance, who was supposed to be Ranjit's friend, was "in reality particularly discontented with him." He had been used as young ambition's ladder, and now, excluded from the council, he had to march with the army without knowing where he was going. Many hoped that he would raise the standard of resistance; and though too quiet by temperament to become a "Revolutionist" on his own, he might well be ready to lean on the British, with whom he had come in contact in Lord Lak's time.¹ It is interesting to speculate on how far the Sikh soldiers would have marched with their Sardars and the British against the rising champion of their nation. Ranjit, in his small way, savoured too much of Napoleon to be viewed impartially by an Englishman.

The real check on Ranjit's 'autocracy' was of a popular nature; and a government that has to humour the public is likely to be supported by the public. The popular sentiment the supported Ranjit was, indeed, coloured by communal feeling. In the past century the peasants and tradesmen of the Panjab had risen against a feudal bureaucracy; in other words—words normally far less satisfactory, but significant on occasion—the Hindus had risen against the Muslims. But whatever regrettable turns it might take, popular sentiment was potent. When Metcalfe reached Lahore in December 1808 he found as much ferment as the Moran affair had aroused in Amritsar. "The Hindoo inhabitants of Lahore have been violent on the same account, and have kept the Raja in his Palace for several days. He has kept the gates closed, and allowed access to very few persons. The Brahmins have assailed him with vociferations from under the walls, and are said to have abstained from food for several days in order to compel him to give them satisfaction."²

There seems to have been a debatable ground between popular sentiment and feudal banditry, occupied, according to Metcalfe's account after the attack on his camp, by the Akalis—"a military brotherhood

¹Metcalfe, No. 36, 8th November, 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 48, 18th December, 1808.

who are considered as the peculiar defenders of the Temple and the Faith. Any person is admitted into this Brotherhood, who feels an inclination to Join it. No qualification is necessary, but a sanguinary disposition, and any reinforcement to the body, from any religion, or any caste, is equally acceptable.....Under the sanction of the supposed holy office, they commit every enormity. They seem to be the terror of the people of the country, in the town of Amritsar particularly and to be free from the control of the Government. Some of them are distinguished by the appellation of Nungee Tulwar Akallee from their always carrying naked swords.....Ranjit Singh tells me that he has confiscated the lands of the Akalis, concerned in the late disturbance.....He informs me that, although he did not think it prudent, whilst the ferment lasted to make any severe example, he is determined henceforth to destroy by degrees, the power and influence of this ungovernable set of Ruffians.”¹

Certainly, Ranjit was only at the beginning of administration. Metcalfe thought that he only called councils in order to listen to flattery ; he consulted many, but was guided by none.² His chiefs, hating him, wished to push him into war ; he distrusted them, but swallowed their adulation.³ Possibly he was *pretending* to swallow it, rather : he could not at present dispense with a form of consulting his treacherous Sardars, and to listen to compliments from them would be as good as listening to anything else. No doubt friction might arise in diplomacy from the fact that Ranjit could not read the Persian of his own correspondence, and his clerks, “obsequious dependents, who literally tremble at his person” ; put down his hasty words with florid exaggeration.⁴ As to his ministers, Metcalfe thought them as little deserving

¹Metcalfe, No. 72, 7th March, 1809, Cp. W. G. Osborn, “The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh” (1840), page 143 :—“Akalis are, without any exception, the most insolent and worthless race of people in all India.” He adds that Ranjit had done much to curb their power, yet they continued to insult him openly and even threaten his life.

²Metcalfe, No, 25, 1st October 1808.

³Metcalfe, No. 29, 15th October, 1808.

⁴Metcalfe, No. 18, 18th September, 1808.

that title as their master that of King ; mere "slaves, that live on his smiles, and die at his frown"¹. "The public conduct of a Prince, if so he can be called, is determined amidst the flattery and fulsome adulation of the low and obsequious companions of his debauches."² This is surely hard language to use of men like Imam-ud-din and Aziz-ud-din.³ Metcalfe's own countrymen were not unfamiliar with the precept "dulce desipere in loco"; he himself is not excused by report from having shown a more than diplomatic relish for certain enjoyments of Ranjit's court.⁴

Metcalfe was naturally interested in Ranjit's army. The Raja, he reported, "is devoted to military pursuits, and passes great part of his time in reviewing and exercising his troops. He evinces anxiety to obtain a knowledge of the European system of discipline, and introduce it as much as possible into his army." Discipline, effective enough, he had already established. "His command in his army is as implicitly obeyed, as perhaps it could be among the best disciplined troops. Every private horseman or footman is compelled to look up to him, as his master, whatever chief he may immediately be attached to, and the chiefs are as much subject to receive orders as the private soldiers."⁵ Ranjit was, it seems, overcoming the great weakness of the Indian armies of the previous century, that the soldiers obeyed the Colonel and cared nothing for the General.

If he was so well obeyed, it seems contradictory in Metcalfe to have viewed his sepoy-model units as designed to rivet his power upon the Sikhs. "These battalions are the Raja's favourite troops, they are the

¹Metcalfe, No. 29, 15th October 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 18.

³Moorcroft ("Travels", 1837. page 94) says that Prabhdiel and Aziz-ud-din advised Ranjit not to go to war, and partly on the strength of this the latter then rose to be the leading minister.

⁴E. Thompson. "The Life of Charles, Lord Metcalfe", 101.

⁵Metcalfe, No. 25. Elphinstone, by contrast, describes the Sikh troops in 1810 as "very Goths in manner and habits, loud talking, boisterous, and addicted to drinking bouts...Chiefs and men all sat down together to eat and drink on a footing of equality..." (Gordon "The Sikhs", 97).

instruments by which he oppresses his countrymen, and maintains his superiority over other Sikh chiefs. (These two notions seemed identical to Metcalfe.) He regards them as the supporters of his power, and evinces towards them the greatest partiality. Many of the men arrive in his service at a considerable rank in his favour : ride horses, wear showy clothes, and carry themselves with great authority, accompanied by its usual attendant, in low minds, insolence."¹ Many of these men were deserters or recruits from the British possessions, and Metcalfe thought a threat of stopping this would deter Ranjit if he persisted in his desire that no Sikhs should be employed by the British." "All the people employed in his intelligence department" were likewise from the Company's territories. Some of his regulars had seen service with the Marathas.²

Of his six battalions of regulars, each numbering two to four hundred men, five were made up of Telingas and Purbias, the other of Hindostanis or Rohillas. All had swords, and most had matchlocks, probably with bayonets. Not all had uniforms. These alone, apart from some artillerymen, were paid in cash, privates drawing Rs. 9 per mensem with twelve annas deducted for the paymaster, or slightly less than the British sepoy. Metcalfe remarked that all the Indian rulers were now forming similar corps, and Ranjit's was about as good as any other : it would not stand against a well-trained army, but was Ranjit's best weapon for subjugating petty chiefs. This last is doubtless true. However much Ranjit may have begun to be identified with the Khalsa, it was initially by use of foreign mercenaries, not by appealing to the nation, that he overthrew Sikh feudalism. It may be that he only discovered as he went on the dynamic force of Sikhism. Nature had not made him a fanatic.

Of his irregular infantry, some were on a permanent footing and were supported by jagirs ; others were hired at need. He enrolled more men than he could afford in 1808 and had to dismiss 4,000 of them at

¹Metcalfe, No. 29, 15th October, 1808.

²Metcalfe, No. 35, 6th November, 1808.

Faridkot. He had also a permanent cavalry, competent and well equipped, accustomed to gallop forward pell-mell, fire, and withdraw, in a way that might be galling to unsupported infantry. "Lands are assigned for the support of the cavalry; and the principal portion of the country is occupied by them." But artillery, as formerly in Europe, was the arch-enemy of feudalism. Ranjit had at this time thirty or forty pieces, and paraded them round the country to strike terror into the disaffected. He was insatiable for guns, and would attack a fort simply to acquire a new one. Among the gunners, the Hindostanis were excellent at their work. Metcalfe saw four big iron guns, each drawn on a three-wheeled carriage by forty or fifty buffaloes. Camel-swivels were also in use.

The vassal chiefs whose forces served with Ranjit were allowed no artillery. As to his total strength, he himself talked magnificently of lacs of troops; rumour gave him 15,000 men and his chiefs the same; Metcalfe put the total at no more than 25,000.¹ Another estimate, given to the Commander-in-Chief by an Indian soldier, was 50,000.²

Metcalfe detected what was to be the standing drawback of the new state; the army it created to unite the Sikhs required ever fresh conquests to sustain it. Ranjit made a yearly conquest, billeted his army on it for a time, then handed it over, for a sum of money, to one of his lieutenants. Every advance necessitated for him a further advance—as it did, Metcalfe noted for "the present ruler of France." Feudalism was being modified rather than destroyed. Metcalfe heard of one district farmed out for Rs. 60,000 a year, but most of the country was assigned to chiefs or jagirdars. "It is almost incredible, yet it is asserted, that he has scarcely any regular revenue from his country.....Ranjit Singh is in consequence free from the expense and trouble of Civil Government, and always at leisure to put himself at the head of his army." He took the field when the corn was high enough to nourish his men and horses—September and October, and February and March—and retired when the crops had been

¹Metcalfe, No. 36, 8th November, 1808.

²Carey to Seton, 10th January, 1809, R.O. II. 103; cp. Osborn, *op.cit.*, 77.

gathered.¹ Most of his successes were bloodless ; his prestige and his army carried all before them. When there was a prospect of resistance, he temporised until his opportunity was ripe. Like Louis XIV, he found sieges more congenial than battles.

XIV. CONCLUSION

Ranjit Singh was willing, both before and after the treaty, to protect his good-will towards the British, and talk in the vein of Dick Swiveller of the wing of friendship never moulting a feather. Whether Metcalfe's treaty did anything towards solidifying these nebulous sentiments is doubtful. The negotiations merely made it clear to both sides that they thoroughly distrusted each other. Armed vigilance was substituted for uncertainty. The only definite change was that the Company had advanced its frontier from the Jumna to the Sutlej ; an illustration of how growing empires continue to grow under a Gladstone as under a Disraeli. As to the pledge of peace and amity, it did not suit either party to attack the other during Ranjit's lifetime ; it would have suited them as little, had there been no treaty.

At a very early stage in the negotiations the British authorities seem to have decided to sacrifice the prime object of the mission. The decision to take under protection of Cis-Sutlej chiefs was announced *before* the French danger receded. Alliances had already been tested and found wanting. "These alliances", as Minto remarked philosophically in 1811, "bear within them the sources of their own decay."² Probably the only point taken seriously in the projected treaty with Ranjit was the permission for British troops to advance to the Indus. It was soon felt that *power* to advance to the Sutlej was a bird in the hand, compared with permission to advance to the Indus. With British troops not far from Lahore, Ranjit could be coerced or brushed aside as soon as it was learned that the French were on the march. So Metcalfe's offer on anti-French treaty was made only to be shelved almost immediately.

¹Metcalfe No. 36, 8th November 1808.

²Kaye, Life of Malcolm, I. 291.

In any case, to have made the Maharaja see his own interests clearly in the diplomatic situation of Europe would have been as hard as for a missionary to enlighten a heathen on the relations between heaven and hell. As it was, Metcalfe could only appear to Ranjit as sent to demand the surrender, under threat of war, of a part of his dominions to which he had as much—or as little—right as to any other part. “Metcalfe was to ask everything and to give nothing unless compelled—and then as little as possible.¹ And if Ranjit was to give up Faridkot to-day, he might be called on to give up Amritsar to-morrow.

Ranjit may have blundered in carrying on his activities across the Sutlej under the very nose of the envoy. He was trying to make hay while the sun shone², and perhaps this was good a time as any later one could have been for him to stand to his claims and test the British attitude. Having played and lost, he had enough self-control to set himself to obtain a treaty of amity, for the sake of its possible value in deterring discontented subjects from conspiracy. It must have been to recoup his prestige that he embarked so speedily, after Metcalfe's departure, on adventures in the Hills and at Multan. (Lawrence believed Metcalfe to have offered him a free hand in other quarters if he left the Doab.³ Had he succeeded in bringing all the Sikhs under him, his *raj* might have differed from what it came to be. It might have been stronger. It might have been more communal.

He seems to have been convinced that it would have added more to his strength than expansion elsewhere ; for his anxiety to reach the Jumna made him oblivious of the advantages of leaving a buffer between himself and the Company—though he may have believed that if the Company protected the Cis-Sutlej chiefs now, it would soon annex them, and no buffer would be left. The British wanted this area as a bastion against the French, not against Ranjit, whom they did not fear. When the French danger evaporated, therefore, they might have retracted

¹Thompson, *op. cit.*, 78.

²N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, 42.

³Cunningham, *op. cit.*, 145, Note.

their decision, but for reasons of prestige, the insistence of the expansionists, and force of habit. Did they satisfy themselves too easily that the chiefs desired their protection against Ranjit? Some no doubt did, but mainly the very weak, like Sahib Singh of Patiala, who could not hope to survive in the rough and tumble of the Lahore system. The hardier had benefited by Ranjit's advent, and could hope to benefit further. They distrusted the advance of the British force; they did not expect at first that they would be released from paying tribute. If there must be a master, they would prefer the weaker, and accept the stronger. They, like the disaffected chiefs inside the Panjab, were not quite free from the sentiment of Sikh brotherhood, and some of their followers would have reminded them of it had war come. Even nowadays, one may say, there is a certain feeling among Sikhs that the Cis-Sutlej states did ill to cut themselves off from the Panjab and accept foreign protection against men of their own faith. Ochterlony was conscious of this sentiment, and wrote in February 1809: "no cordial co-operation is to be expected from them in the event of actual hostilities with that chief (Ranjit) as I am persuaded they connect the subjection of his territory and dominion with the extinction of their own power as a nation, and though I am fully aware of the disaffection which his ambition, tyranny and oppression have excited in the Punjab, I am still dubious whether without previous stipulations the Western chiefs would desert his standard and subject themselves to foreign interferences, differing so essentially in manners, customs and opinions."¹

The wisdom of the British decision is hard to find apart from its fairness to Ranjit. If he had been allowed to absorb the debated area, he might well have joined resolutely in an anti-French alliance, and he would then have been a stronger friend. On the other hand, if the French had actually appeared on the scene and found him smarting under his disappointment, he would certainly have joined *them*. The Cis-Sutlej chiefs would then have been a broken reed for the Company to lean on. Even

¹Ochterlony to Government, 18th February, 1809, R.O.X. 8; printed, P. G. R., No. 25.

if they did not join the enemy, the confusion in their country would have depended into anarchy, and the British troops at Ludhiana would have been in an uncomfortable position. This had moreover some time previously been recognised quite clearly by the authorities. "The Sikh chieftains", it had been laid down,... "could not by any arrangement be rendered efficient allies and auxiliaries against an invading enemy... In the event of invasion they would probably add by their junction to the number of the invaders, and increase their means of invasions."¹ The truth of this was confirmed by experience after many years of 'protection'. In the first Sikh War, the British troops had to move through the territories of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs. "Their sympathies were all with the Sikhs, and their value as allies to the British was soon seen to be negligible, few chiefs displaying their loyalty to their engagements more conspicuously than by abstaining from open rebellion. Bad as administrators, were now seen to be unreliable as allies."²

We may well see, then, in the decision taken a confusion of thought: the expansionist school, under specious pretexts, gaining its way over the conservatives. The compromise was most of all unsatisfactory with reference to the system to be established in the protected area. This was to be—no system at all. The Government that Ranjit set up wherever he carried his arms had its faults, but it was certainly not anarchy. Anarchy was precisely what the Company proposed to 'protect'. Clearly, once the responsibility had been undertaken, Metcalfe and Ochterlony were right in arguing that it must involve some supervision over the chiefs. It was most reluctantly that Government assented to this. In 1811, when Ochterlony visited the hopelessly distracted state of Patiala and wished, in consultation with Nabha and Jhind, to put the administration on a fresh basis, he was instructed to confine himself to giving advice when asked for it.³ Yet the peace-and-retrenchment statesmen had clung to their principles to the extent of denying themselves any financial profit

¹Kaye, *Life of Metcalfe*, 169.

²Trevaskis, "Land of the Five Rivers," 297.

³Griffin, *op.cit.*, 125-26.

from their new province, famished as their exchequer then was. This being so, it may perhaps be regretted that in some districts at least the bold experiment, was not tried of making a ryotwari settlement, with no taxation beyond the minimum required for local police. For many of the villages had been virtually independent—as they had been at the gates of Delhi only a few years before ; and freed from the necessity of self-defence against the baronage, they might have dropped the marauding habits they had acquired and returned to peaceful agriculture. One reason, of course, for not annexing the Doab outright was that experience in the Delhi province had just shown how unprofitable and troublesome such chaotic acquisitions were apt to be. The compromise left them at the mercy of the feudalists. The peasants of that generation might have said, like the yokels brought on to platforms by the Anti-Corn Law League,—“We be protected, and we be starving.”

In short, if we view this episode as a small meal for Imperialism, we may say that often both the expansionists and their opponents had good intentions, but the former tended to go astray on means, the latter on ends ; and they did worst when they compromised with each other.¹

There was something romantic in the encounter between the youthful Metcalfe and the adventurous Ranjit, and there has been some tendency, in retrospect, to sentimentalise their relations. Metcalfe's despatches make it clear that there was no love lost between them. The envoy was always one of Wellesley's young men. His mission came near to paralleling that of Malcolm to Persia. He complained copiously of Ranjit's faithlessness at a time when he himself was in touch with traitors inside Ranjit's dominions. He saw in the Raja a tyrant, whom, however, he was able to criticise very freely in conversation with the Raja's own ministers. He underrated Ranjit. All Englishmen of his time underrated all Sikhs ; with some excuse, for they came in touch with the robber barons, not with the newly-emerged democracy, and knew very little of its religion or

¹Cunningham, *op.cit.*, 150-3, points out how gradually, later on, the Government's attitude towards the Chiefs had to be defined, and with what misunderstandings of the situation the Government set out.

